NANA'S BROTHER

BY ÉMILE ZOLA.

AUTHOR OF "NANA," "L'ASSOMMOIR," "LA TERRE," "CLAUDE'S CONFESSION," "POT-BOUILLE," "THERESE RAQUIN," "HER TWO HUSBANDS," "ALBINE," "LE REVE" THE DREAM," "THE GIRL IN SCARLET," "MAGDALEN FERAT," "COURT OF LOUIS NAPOLEON," "RENEE; OR, IN THE WHIRLPOOL," "CHRISTINE, THE MODEL," "THE JOLLY PARISIENNES," "HELENE," "THE SHOP-GIRLS OF PARIS," "THE JOYS OF LIFE," "A MAD LOVE," "THE FLOWER GIRLS OF MARSEILLES," "THE FLOWER AND MARKET GIRLS OF PARIS," ETC.

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SON OF

"GERVAISE" AND "LANTIER," OF "L'ASSOMMOIR."

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CHAPTER I.

STEPHEN LANTIER.

NANA'S BROTHER, Stephen Lantier, son of Gervaise and Lantier of "L'Assommoir," was walking on an open plain, under a starless night of the obscurity and density of ink, and pushing along the highway from Marchiennes to Montsou, a distance of seven miles, cutting straight across the turnip fields. In front of him he did not even see the black ground, and his only sensation of the immense flat horizon was derived from gusts of March winds, squalls as extended as if upon an ocean, frozen from having swept leagues of marshes and bare lands. Not the shadow of a tree stained the sky, the miles of road rolled away with the regularity of a jetty, amidst the blustering mist that came from the darkness.

He had started from Marchiennes at about two o'clock in the morning. He walked with a long stride, shivering beneath the thin cotton of his vest and of his velvet pantaloons. A little bundle tied up in a check handkerchief bothered him a great deal; and he pressed it against his sides, now with one elbow, now

with the other, to slip into the depths of his pockets both his hands, benumbed, raw, and bleeding with the nipping blast. But one idea occupied the sluggish brain of the workman without work and without shelter—the hope that the cold would abate with daybreak. He had been tramping along in that way for about an hour and a half when suddenly he saw three red fires leaping up into the sky, three braziers burning in the open air, in which they seemed suspended, as it were. At first he hesitated, a nameless fear taking possession of him; a moment afterwards he yielded to the distressing need of thawing his frozen hands, if only for an instant.

There was a deep hollow descending abruptly in that direction. For a short time every thingdisappeared from his view. On his right an immense hoarding, made of coarse deal boards, an inclosure to some railway siding probably; on his left a grassy knoll, atop of which, but behind, a confused mass of gables, the low and irregular roofs of the village houses. He advanced another two hundred steps. Suddenly, at a bend of the road, the fires reappeared quite close to him, without his being able to understand any more than before how they burned so high in the dead sky like incandescent moons. Level with the ground another sight stopped his progress. It was a heavy mass, a stunted heap of irregular buildings, from amidst which arose the sharp outline of a factory chimney; some rare flashes of light pierced through the grimy windows; five or six lanterns burning low hung outside, against a wooden structure, whose blackened beams vaguely shaped themselves into the profile of a gigantic settle-board; and from this phantom-like apparition, drowned in darkness and smoke, there arose but one sound, the thick and prolonged panting of a steam engine, hidden from sight.

Then the man knew that he was near a coal-pit. His false shame was again getting the better of him. What was the good of asking? There was sure to be no work. Instead of going towards the building he at last ventured up the huge mound of slack lying close to the pit, and at the top of which the three coal fires were burning in iron braziers, to give light and warmth to those at work still. The quarrymen had no doubt worked late, for the useless shale was still being taken out of the mine. He could hear the banksmen push the trains on to the huge settle-board, he could distinguish the living figures tilting the trucks near each fire.

"Good morning," he said, approaching one of the braziers.

With his back to the fire stood the wagoner, a diminutive old man, dressed in peach-colored woolen jersey, his head

covered with a cap made of rabbit skin, while his horse, a big, yellowish animal, remained stock still, waiting for the six trucks he had drawn up to be emptied. The man working the tilter—a tall, lean, reddish fellow—was apparently in no hurry; he handled his lever in a heavy, sleepy way. And above it all, the wind was careering madly; there was an icy blast cutting into the flesh like the thongs of a whip.

"Good morning," answered the old man.

Then both were silent. The new comer, who felt the suspicious look of his interlocutor, told his name at once.

"My name is Stephen Lantier; I am an engine-man. Any chance of getting a job here?"

The flames of the coal fire, burning bright just then, fell full upon his handsome, dark features. He might be somewhat over twenty, looking strong enough, in spite of his small limbs.

The wagoner cast another glance at him, and evidently satisfied with his examination, shook his head. "A job for an engine-man I am sure there isn't. There were two here yesterday. They went away as they came."

A gust of wind cut short his speech. Then Stephen, pointing to the somber mass of buildings at the foot of the mound, asked, "It is a coal pit, isn't it?"

This time the old man could not answer at all. A violent fit of coughing almost choked him. At last he expectorated, and the saliva left a dark stain on the purplish ground.

"Yes, it's a pit, the Voreux pit. Look, the miners' village is quite close."

And with outstretched arm he indicated the village, the low roofs of which the young man had vaguely noticed in the dark. But the six trucks were empty by this time; so the wagoner went on behind them without as much as cracking his whip, his attenuated legs stiff with rheumatism; while the yellowish horse started all by himself, lazily trudging between the rails, to the accompaniment of a fresh gust of wind which made the hair of his shaggy coat stand on end.

The Voreux pit began to assume less fantastic proportions to Stephen, who stood musing before the fire, entirely given up to the comfort of warming his poor, bleeding hands. Looking up he recognized each part of the mechanism whereby the pit was worked—the large coal staiths, their walls coated with tar, the top of the shaft, the large engine-room, the square tower of the pumping machine. This pit, lying at the bottom of a hollow, with its stunted brick buildings, lifting its chimney like a threatening battering ram, gave him the impres-

sion of a wild voracious animal crouching down there to devour every one. While carefully examining each detail he began to think of the vagabond life he had led for the last week, during which he had looked in vain for a new place. He saw himself in his shed at the railway works, slapping his overseer's face; sacked at Lille; getting the cold shoulder everywhere. On Saturday he got as far as Marchiennes where they said there was a job to be had at the ironworks; but there was neither a job at the ironworks nor at the Sonneville building yards. His Sunday had been spent in a timber yard, whence the watchman expelled him at two in the morning. He hadn't a penny in the world, nor a crust of bread to eat. What was to become of him, wandering across the country, without a definite aim, without a shelter from the nipping, bitter blast. Yes, this was a pit right enough; the few lanterns shedding their light on the inclosure of the shaft, and a door suddenly opened and shut had enabled him to catch a glimpse of the red-hot furnaces of the boiler-room. He even explained to himself the noise of the pumping engine, the heavy and prolonged thudding of the hungry monster, never satisfied, booming incessantly.

The fellow at the tilting crane had not taken the least notice of Stephen. The latter was just picking up his bundle, which had fallen to the ground, previous to going, when the sound of violent coughing apprised him of the return of the wagoner. He saw him slowly emerging from the surrounding darkness, followed by the yellowish horse, who was pulling six newly-filled trucks.

"Are there any factories at Montsou?" inquired the young man.

The old man spat again on the ground, and tried to raise his voice above the wind. "There are factories enough, as far as that goes. You should have been here three or four years ago. Every thing was brisk then; there weren't hands enough, wages had never been better. But now we have to play 'pinch-belly' again. It's real misery throughout the country; they're sending away their hands; all the factories are shutting up one after another. May be it is not the Emperor's fault, but why does he want to go fighting in Mexico, without reckoning that the animals are dying of the cholera, as well as human folk."

After which the two continued to mingle their complaints, their jerky phrases cut shorter still every now and then by the sweeping gusts of wind. Stephen told the old man of his useless errands of the last week. He had better lie down in the

road and have done with it. If things went on in that way, the high roads would soon be swarming with beggars. To which the old man replied that it would come to that at last, clenching his assertion with an appeal to Providence and taking Him to witness "whether it could be right that so many Christians should be thrown into the streets, homeless and without food."

"That's true enough," remarked Stephen; "we don't get meat every day."

"Meat?" replied the wagoner, "if we only got bread it would be something." Another gust of wind compelled them once more to interrupt their conversation; then the old man, pointing to the south, volunteered the information that "Montsou was over yonder." And again, with outstretched hand, he indicated some spots invisible in the darkness, naming them as he went. Out yonder the Fauvelle sugar works were still going, but the Hoton refinery had sacked half of its hands. The only factories that seemed to be able to bear up were Bleuze's rope yard and Dutilleul's flour mills.

With a sweeping motion of his hand, embracing half of the horizon, he turned to the north. The Sonneville building yards had not got a third of their usual orders; at the Marchiennes smelting works only two furnaces out of the three were alight; worse still, a strike was being talked of at the Gagebois glass works because the masters wanted to lower the wages.

"I know—I know all about it," repeated the young man, as the old one went on explaining, "I know all about it. I went to look for a job at every one of them."

"As for ourselves," resumed the old man, "we are still kept going, though all the pits have lowered their output. Look at the Victory blasting works, there are only two fires alight." To conclude which consoling speech, he expectorated and prepared himself to start once more behind the sleepy horse and the empty trucks.

From the spot where Stephen stood he could overlook the whole country. The darkness was as dense as ever, but the bony hand of the old man seemed to have filled it with a crushing hopeless misery, which the young man felt unconsciously settling upon himself and upon every thing around in this vast boundless expanse. What was this yelling blast but the heart-rending wail of hunger, uprising from the bleak and woodless country? The rapidly succeeding squalls were lashing themselves into a fury; they seemed to sound the death knell of all labor, to bring in their wake a famine that would lay low

thousands and thousands. And Stephen's restless glances, wandering hither and thither, tried to pierce the heavy gloom, eager and yet afraid to look. Every thing lapsed into chaos in this bottomless abyss of darkness; he only saw in the distance the lurid flames of the coke ovens and smelting furnaces leap upwards to the sky, while the two towers to the left burned blueish like two gigantic torches. There was all the melancholy of an immense conflagration about the scene; no other stars arose in the pitch dark firmament than these nocturnal fires in the land of coal and iron.

"You belong to Belgium, perhaps?" suddenly said the voice of the old wagoner, who had come back and was standing behind him.

He had only brought three trucks this time. They might as well be emptied while the accident to the cage was being repaired. A bolt that had given way would stop the work for at least a quarter of an hour. Down below every thing had become silent; the banksmen were standing still, the rumbling of the trucks across the platform had ceased. Only the sound of the smith's hammer fell upon the ear.

"No, I come from the south," answered the young man. The red-haired fellow, having emptied the trucks, had squatted down, but too pleased with the accident. He kept obstinately silent, only lifting his large dull eyes to the old carter as if overwhelmed with so much talk. In fact, the latter was as a rule by no means talkative. The face of the stranger evidently pleased him, and he was taken with an itching of the tongue and a desire to unburthen himself, which often causes old folks to talk aloud to themselves.

"I," he said, "belong to Montsou; my name is Bonnemort." (Jollycorpse).

"A nickname assuredly?" asked Stephen.

The old man gave a guffaw, a cross between a sneer and a laugh, and pointed to the Voreux pit. "That's it, lad. Three times they took me out of there in several pieces; the first time with every hair of my body singed away like that of a racehorse; the second time with my carcass choke-full of sand and soil up to my throat; the third time with my stomach full of water, and blown out like a frog. Then, when they saw that I wouldn't kick the bucket, they named me Jollycorpse just for fun."

He was getting very lively, his voice sounding like the creaking of a badly greased wheel, his jollity interrupted every now and then by a violent fit of coughing. The fire was shining full upon his enormous head, with its gray and scanty

hair, its flat face almost livid but for some bluish spots all over it. He was very short, with an apoplectic neck, attenuated legs, and splay feet, long arms, the square but bony hands of which descended to his knees. Like his horse, which remained motionless, he seemed to be cut out of stone ; he appeared to feel neither the biting cold nor to hear the terrific squalls whistling past his ears. When he had done coughing, his throat racked with the violence of the effort, he merely spat down at the foot of the brazier and the soil became black. Stephen looked at him, looked at the soil which he stained in so strange a fashion. "You have been at work for a good many years at the mines, I suppose?" he said. Jollycorpse threw up his long flail-like arms in astonishment. "For a good many years?" he repeated. "I should think so. I was barely eight when I joined the lads below, and now I am fifty-eight, so reckon it out for yourself. I have been every thing down there, from trammer, when I got the strength to push the trucks, to pitman, when I could ply a pick. Eighteen years of the last job. Then, on account of my darned legs, they set me to quarrying; after which I had a bout at cogging; at last I looked to the props, until they had to take me out, because the doctor said I was like to leave my bones there. It's only five years ago that I became wagoner; so I have had fifty years of it in all, forty-five of them 'down below.' What say you to that, lad?"

While he was talking a large block of flaming coal that had fallen from the brazier fully threw its light upon his features, which, instead of looking livid as usual, now assumed a crimson hue.

"They told me to take some rest," he went on, "but I don't see it. I'm not such a flat as they think me. I am right enough for another two years, until I'm sixty, and then I'll have my pension of a hundred and eighty francs. If I were to say good-by now they'd ship me off with one of a hundred and fifty francs. They are sharp as needles, the masters. Besides, if it weren't for my legs, I'd be solid enough, but it's that confounded water that's got between my skin and flesh, and no wonder ; I got such a dose of it in the cuttings. There are days that I can't stir a step without pain." Another fit of coughing interrupted him.

"And that's what makes you cough like that?" asked Stephen.

"No, it's not that, lad; but I caught cold a month since. I never had a cough before and now I can't get rid of it. It's odd, but I cough and cough——" And he had to stop again for

full a minute, after which the black saliva stained the ground anew.

"Is it blood you are bringing up?" asked Stephen, taking heart at last to question him.

Jollycorpse slowly wiped his lips with the back of his hand. "No, it's coal. I've got enough of it inside me to keep me warm for the rest of my days. And still it's five years since I set my foot 'below.' It seems I had it in stock without being aware of it. Never mind; it keeps me dry."

The two men were silent once more; the strokes of the smith's hammer ascended rhythmically from the shaft below; the wind howled past them like a wail of distress and weariness ringing through the dense depths of the night. In front of the red-hot brazier, the lurid flames of which leaped up fanned by the blast, the old miner kept chewing the cud of his recollections. It wasn't since yesterday that he and his had been plying the pick down below. The family had worked for the Montsou Mining Company ever since it started, more than a century ago. His grandfather, William Maheu, then but a stripling of fifteen, had been the first to find caking coal in the Requillart pit, the first the company worked. It was over yonder, close by the Fauvelle sugar works, but it was not going now. This was known all over the country, because the seam was called the William seam, after his grandfather's Christian name. He, Jollycorpse, had never known him; but from what he had been told, he must have been very strong and tall; though he did die at sixty, without the doctors having been able to find out his complaint. His father, Nicholas Maheu, called the Red, had died when he was barely forty, down in this very Voreux pit, which was being sunk at the time. There had been a slip, and when he was found, flat as a pancake, both blood and bones had been crushed out of him by the masses of rock beneath which he lay buried. Two of his uncles and his three brothers had also left their skins below. He, Vincent Maheu, who had come out of it considerably damaged, but alive, was considered the clever one of the family by his mates. But what else could a man do? A man had to work at something; as well work at this trade as at any other. His son, Toussaint Maheu, as well as the latter's sons and all his family, who were living opposite in the miners' village, were risking their lives down below every day. Over a hundred years of coal mining, the young ones after the elders, and for the same "guv'nor;" there were a good many trader folks who couldn't tell their pedigrees so well.

"After all, as long as one gets a stomach full of food, what's the odds?" remarked Stephen.

"That's what I say; as long as one gets 'wittles' to keep body and soul together," chimed in the old man. After which he kept silent, and turned towards the miners' village where a few lights began to twinkle behind the windows. It struck four on the clock of Montsou; the cold was getting more biting.

"Your company is very rich," said Stephen.

The old man shrugged his shoulders, then dropped them as if overwhelmed by the weight of money.

"Rich? I should think so indeed. Perhaps not so rich as its neighbor, the Anzin Company, but untold millions for all that. Thirteen pits going. Ten thousand workmen and concessions spreading over sixty-seven communes; an output of five thousand tons a day; a railway connecting all the pits; and workshops and factories. Yes, yes, plenty of brass there."

The rumbling of some trucks on the settle-board made the yellowish horse prick up its ears. The cage had been repaired by this time; the banksmen had renewed work. While putting his four-footed companion to the trucks, the wagoner added in a low voice, addressing himself to his beast, "Shouldn't get in the habit of jabbering like that, you idle brute. If M. Hennebeau knew that you were wasting your time like this!"

Stephen, who overheard the remark while looking up in the sky, asked, "Then the mine belongs to M. Hennebeau?"

"No," explained the old man, "M. Hennebeau is only the general director. He is paid like the rest of us."

With a motion of the hand the young man pointed to the vast expanse which he divined, as it were, behind the surrounding darkness. "To whom does all this belong, then?"

But Jollycorpse could not answer immediately. He was being choked by another fit of coughing, so violent, indeed, that it took him some minutes to recover his breath. But when he had expectorated and wiped his lips with the back of his hand, he said, shouting above the wind. "All this. We don't know. To somebody, I suppose," and with his index he pointed to some distant and undefined spot, peopled by the folk for whom the Maheus had been working for over a century. His voice had assumed a kind of religious awe: it was as if he were alluding to some inaccessible tabernacle, wherein throned, or rather crouched, the insatiable power to which they were sacrificing their flesh and blood, without ever having beheld it face to face.

"If one had, at least, bread every day," resumed Stephen, reverting to his original train of thought, without the least attempt at transition.

"As you say, if one had bread every day, but that would, perhaps, be too much of a good thing."

The horse was gone, the wagoner followed, taking it very easy. The red-haired fellow attending to the tilting crane had not stirred from his recumbent position. He was not asleep, but merely gathered up in a bundle, his head betwixt his knees, staring at nothing in particular with his two vacant eyes.

Stephen still lingered, though he had taken up his bundle. He felt his back being chilled by the bitter blast, while his front was roasting near the fire. He would do well, perhaps, after all, to inquire at the pit; the old man might not know. Besides, he would take any job. What was to become of him? Where was he to go in this country, starving for want of work. Was he to die like a dog behind some hedge? Nevertheless he hesitated. He had a nameless fear of the Voreux pit, with its ever hungry jaw, in the midst of this bleak country, drowned in the densest obscurity. At each squall the wind seemed to increase. Not a gleam of dawn lighted up the heavens. Only the coke ovens and the smelting furnaces threw their lurid light against the dead sky, and the Voreux pit, with its stunted structures, took a still more crouching attitude, panting louder and louder with its thick and heavy breath, as if obstructed in its painful digestion of human flesh and blood.

CHAPTER II.

THE MAHEUS.

THE miners' village of "The Two Hundred and Forty," standing on a gentle slope amidst the corn and turnip fields, was fast asleep under the black and storm-driven sky. Its four double rows of cottages, built back to back, on the self same pattern, like a barracks or the wings of a hospital, and divided by three avenues of equal width and length cut up into so many tiny patches of garden, showed blurred and indistinct in the surrounding darkness. And the wind still

kept up its moaning accompaniment to the creaking of the rickety garden-gates.

At No. 16 of the second row, the cottage of the Maheus, not a soul had stirred. The solitary room of its first floor was still wrapt in a deep gloom that seemed to throw its crushing weight on the slumbers of the human beings one felt to be lying there, tired out with the day's labor and snoring profoundly. In spite of the bitter cold the air felt close, vitiated—like the atmosphere of the most closely-shut dormitories when too great a herd of human cattle is littered in them.

The clock in the room on the ground-floor struck four; still nothing stirred; the chorus of soft breathing, drowned now and then by two powerfully snoring basses, continued uninterruptedly. But suddenly Catherine sat up in bed. From sheer habit she had counted the four strokes of the clock below without having had the strength to wake up completely. She only jerked her legs from under the blankets, and in that position fumbled about for a match wherewith to light the candle. For a moment or so she remained seated on the edge of the mattress. Her head felt so heavy that it dropped back between her shoulders, yielding to the irresistible desire to seek the bolster again.

The wick had burned bright by now, and threw its yellow gleam across the square room, with its two windows and three bedsteads. A table, a worm-eaten wardrobe, and two chairs, all of walnut wood, completed the furniture. Their smoky color contrasted glaringly with the walls, washed a bright yellow. There was nothing else in the room save a few clothes dangling from some nails. A red stone pitcher and a pan of the same material, doing duty as a wash-hand-basin, stood on the landing. In the bed to the left, Zachariah, the eldest of the children, a lad of about twenty-one, was asleep with Johnny, an urchin of eleven. In the bed to the right, two little ones, Leonard and Henry, the first about ten years old, the other only four. They had crept close, their arms round each other's necks. Catherine shared the third bed with her sister Alzira, a lassie of nine. She was so small for her age, that but for the deformity of the little invalid, which bumped against the other's ribs, Catherine would not have felt her to be there. The glazed door stood open, and showed the passage of the landing, a kind of narrow, funnel-like hole, where the father and mother occupied the fourth bed, against which stood the cradle of the latest addition to the family, Estella, scarcely three months old.

Catherine made a desperate effort. She stretched herself

and clutched with both hands at her red hair, which tumbled over her forehead and neck. Rather delicate for sixteen, her arms and legs were finely moulded, the former very white, the latter, as well as her feet, tattooed as it were by the incessant contact with the coal dust. Her complexion had already become sallow with the daily use of soft soap. A final yawn made her open her somewhat large mouth with splendid teeth, albeit set in gums that spoke plainly of chlorosis. The gray eyes were still moist with sleep, against which she struggled with painful and weary efforts, twisting her almost nude body into fantastic contortions.

But a kind of prolonged grunt came from the landing. It was the voice of Maheu himself, and not very musical either, just now.

"D—— it all, it's time to get up. Are you lighting up, Catherine?"

"Yes, father; it's just struck below."

"Look sharp about it, then. If you had danced a little less last night, you would have called us a little earlier. A nice lazy life to lead."

And he continued to grumble, but was again overcome with sleep, so that his words became indistinct, and were finally lost in a long and deep-drawn snore.

The young girl, still in her night-dress, her bare feet on the brick floor, moved lazily about the room. As she went she tucked in the two little ones, whose counterpane had slipped down. They did not stir, plunged as they were in the heavy sleep of childhood. Alzira—wide awake—had turned over without a word to take the warm place left by her big sister.

"I say, Zachariah; I say, you Johnny, I say, wake up," repeated Catherine, standing before her two brothers, who continued to snore, their noses buried in the bolster. She was obliged to take the big one by the shoulder and to shake him. While he was rewarding her with muttered curses, she took the opportunity of pulling away the bed-clothes. When she saw the two trying to cover themselves with nothing, flinging their bare legs into the air, the sight seemed so droll to her that she burst out laughing.

"Don't be an idiot, leave me alone," muttered Zachariah angrily, though getting himself in a sitting posture. "I don't like practical jokes. And to think that one must get up whether one likes it or not," he added.

He was thin, badly made, with a long face, dirty, as it were, with the few scanty bristles of a sprouting beard. He had yellow hair, and the bloodless, sickly complexion common to

the rest of the family. As his shirt was rucking up he pulled it down, not from a feeling of decency, but because he felt cold.

"It's struck down stairs," repeated Catherine. "Get on your things, or father will be angry."

Johnny, who had made himself snug again, and closed his eyes, took it upon himself to answer, "Go and be hanged, I'm asleep."

Catherine burst out laughing. He was so small, with his tiny limbs and enormous joints, the latter made bigger still with his scrofulous complaint, that without an effort she took him into her arms. But he began kicking; his pale, monkey-ish, puckered face, with its green eyes and large ears, turned livid at the idea of his own weakness. He said nothing but bit her on the right breast.

"You spiteful little brute," she murmured, suppressing a cry and putting him down.

Alzira, silent but wide awake, had pulled the bed-clothes up to her chin. She was watching, with the wistful, intelligent eyes of the confirmed cripple, her sister and brothers, who were dressing themselves. There was another quarrel round the red stone pan; the lads hustled the young girl because she took too long washing herself. There was not the least attempt at or wish for privacy of any sort. Besides, Catherine was ready first. She got into her miner's trowsers, put on her canvas jacket, tied her blue handkerchief around her chignon and under her chin; and in her clean Monday morning clothes, she looked like a little man. Nothing betrayed of her own sex, save the slight undulation of the hips.

"When the old 'un comes in," said Zachariah, spitefully, "he won't like his bed being tumbled about. I'll tell him you've done it."

He was talking of his grandfather, of old Jollycorpse, who belonged to the night shift and slept during the day. The bed had not time to get cold, there was always some one snoring in it.

Without answering him, Catherine began to smooth the bed-clothes and to tuck them in. But for the last minute or so there was a noise behind the wall, in the next cottage. Those tenements of brick, run up on the cheap by the company, were so thin, that the faintest breath could be heard through the walls. Folk lived cheek-by-jowl as it were, from one end to the other; and not the smallest domestic detail could remain hidden, even from the lads. A heavy footstep had ascended the staircase, then there was the sound of some-

body falling on a soft substance, accompanied by a sigh of relief.

"All right," said Catherine. "Levaques goes down and Bouteloup takes his place."

Johnny grinned, and even Alzira's eyes glistened. Every morning they made merry in that way about their next door neighbors.

"Philomena has a bad cough," said Catherine after having listened again. She spoke of the eldest of the Levaques, a big girl of nineteen, the mother of Zachariah's two children. She was weak in the chest—so weak, indeed, that she could not go "down below," and was working at the pit's mouth as a corf picker.

"Ah, what, it isn't Philomena at all," replied Zachariah, "she wouldn't waste her time with coughing; she's fast asleep. She's got the luck of it to be able to sleep till six o'clock." In the act of pulling on his trowsers an idea seemed to strike him, for immediately after he opened the window. Outside, in the dark, the village was waking up; one by one the lights began to twinkle between the chinks of the closed Venetian blinds. Then there was another dispute between Zachariah and his sister. He was leaning out of the window in order to get some fresh food for a scandal that was current in connection with the head viewer and one of the banksmen's wives. But his sister shouted to him that he was troubling himself for nothing, at any rate this morning, because Pierron (the banksman in question) was working the day shift just now. The cold wind came through the open window in icy blasts; both were getting excited in maintaining the truth of their assertions, when a loud wail coming from the dark tunnel put an end to their discussion. It was the baby in the cradle, who objected to the cold air being let in upon her.

This time Maheu was wide awake at once. They could hear him working himself into a passion. What the devil was the matter with him to have dropped off again like a lazy brute? And he began to swear so loud that the children in the room dared not breathe. Zachariah and Johnny finished washing themselves, but dawdled along, showing that they were tired already before starting. Alzira, her eyes wide open, kept watching silently. The two little ones, Leonora and Henry, still lying in each other's arms, continued to breathe softly in spite of the noise around them.

"Catherine, give me the candle," shouted Maheu. She finished buttoning her jacket, then took the candle to the dark tunnel, leaving her brothers to look for their clothes by the

faint glimmer that came through the open door. Her father flung himself out of bed. But she did not wait, and went down in her coarse woolen stockings to the room on the ground floor where she lit another candle to make the coffee by. All the clogs of the family were ranged in a line, under the sideboard.

"Wilt'st hold your noise, brat?" shouted Maheu, still more exasperated at the cries of Estella, who would not leave off yelling.

He was short, like old Jollycorpse, a kind of puffed out likeness of the wagoner, with a flat and shallow face like the latter, and close-cropped yellow hair. But the baby cried louder still, frightened at the knotty arm sawing the air above her.

"Leave her alone; you know well enough she will not hold her tongue for all your shouting," said the wife, shifting to the middle of the bed.

She had also woke up and was grumbling. It was a shame not to be able to get a good night's rest. Why could not they get up and go off quietly? She lazily stretched out, with the bed-clothes snugly wrapped round her, nothing visible of her but her elongated face with good but coarse features, though already withered at thirty-nine by a life of privation, and the seven children she had borne. Her eyes lifted to the ceiling, she began to hold forth slowly, while her man was dressing. The child kept on crying, neither of them taking the least notice.

"Haven't I told you? I'm without a penny, and it's only Monday; six days to wait for the fortnight's pay. It's no good; we can't go on like this. Between the lot of you, you bring in nine francs a day, and how am I to manage with that? There's ten of us."

"Nine francs, nine francs," grumbled Maheu. "I and Zachariah three francs each, that makes six; Catherine and the old man two each; four and six makes ten, and Johnny one, that makes eleven."

"You forget the Sundays and off days. I tell you it never comes to more than nine."

He didn't answer, because he was stooping to look for his leather belt that had fallen down. By and by he replied:—

"Don't you grumble, old girl, I keep up very well. There's many a one who, at forty-two, is obliged to take to propping or cogging."

"May be, old man, but consolation doesn't put bread into our mouths. How am I to manage? You've no brass?

"I've got two sous."

"Keep them, to have a drop o' summat. Good heavens, what am I to do? Six days—there'll be no end to them. We owe sixty francs at the baker's, who showed me the door the day before yesterday. He won't give us any more bread. I'll try again by and by, but what if he won't?" And the woman went on in the same mournful tone, lying perfectly still, only closing her eyes now and then to shield them from the melancholy flicker of the candle. She repeated that the cupboard was empty, and that the children were asking for bread. Even the coffee was all gone, and the water gave one the colic. And these long, weary days, with nothing to cheat one's hunger but boiled cabbage leaves. Little by little she was obliged to raise her voice, the child's cries drowning her words. These cries became unbearable at last. Maheu seemed to become aware of them all at once; for, beside himself, fuming and stuttering with anger, he snatched the baby from the cradle and flung her on the bed.

"There, take her, or I'll strangle her. The beastly brat wants for nothing, suckles as much as she likes, and makes more noise than any of the others."

In fact, the little one had crept close to the mother, and, comforted by the warmth of the bed, was quietly taking the breast.

"Haven't the folk at the 'Piolaine' told you to go and see them?" asked Maheu, after a short pause. The wife pursed her lips with an air of scarcely-concealed doubt. "Yes; I met them in the road, they were giving away clothing to the poor children. I'll take Leonora and Henry to them this morning, if they only give me a five-franc piece."

Silence between them once more. Maheu was ready; he stood stock still for a moment, then in a hushed voice closed the discussion.

"What's the good of fretting? Do the best you can; see that you get some soup. It's no use wasting more words, better go down to work."

"Surely," answered the wife. "Blow out the candle, I don't want it to see the color of my thoughts." He did as he was bidden. Zachariah and Johnny were going down stairs. He followed them, and the stair-case creaked beneath their heavy feet, albeit they had nothing on them but coarse woolen stockings. Behind them every thing had relapsed into gloom. The little ones slept. Even Alzira had closed her eyes. But the mother remained wide awake in the darkness, while the baby uttered now and then a short grunt of satisfaction like the purring of a kitten.

Down stairs Catherine had at once looked to the fire, which was always kept alight in the middle grate, flanked by two big ovens. The company allowed to each family per month about four hundred-weight of shale, a hard coal lost in the haulage. It burned slowly, and the young girl who settled the fire every night found it ready to her hand in the morning by simply putting a few soft nubbly bits atop of it to make it burn up cheerfully, after which she put the kettle on, and squatted down before the sideboard.

It was a large room, occupying the whole of the ground floor, its walls painted apple-green, its well-scrubbed brick floor bestrewn with white sand. Every thing was as clean as in a Flemish homestead. Besides the sideboard of painted deal, the furniture consisted of a table and some chairs of the same material. Pasted on the walls, a few highly-colored prints, the portraits of the Emperor and the Empress, given by the company; some saints and some soldiers with lots of gold illumination about them, contrasted violently with the simplicity of the rest; for save a pink cardboard box on the sideboard, there were no other ornaments, unless it was the gaudily-painted dial of the old-fashioned clock, which, with its loud ticking, seemed to fill the void of the whole. Notwithstanding its great cleanliness, a smell of boiled onion, locked in the cupboard of the sideboard since the previous night, poisoned the heated atmosphere, rendered too heavy already by the never-ceasing fumes of the burning coal.

Nevertheless, Catherine remained squatted before the open cupboard; she was thinking. There was only a hunk of bread left; there was plenty of cheese, but scarcely a scrap of butter. And still she had to make tartines (very thick sandwiches with something or nothing between them) for four. At last she made up her mind. She cut the slices of bread as thick as possible, covered one with cheese and scraped the other with butter and stuck them together. It was the *briquet* (derived from "brick") which they took with them every morning. The four "bricks" were soon laid out in a row upon the table; assigned according to the strictest dictates of equity, from the largest for the father to the smallest for little Johnny.

Though by this time the kettle was on the boil, Catherine, who appeared to be entirely absorbed by her household duties, opened the front door and looked out into the dark night. Was she thinking of the scandal alluded to by Zachariah when he looked out of the window up stairs? At any rate she saw nothing connected with it; there were merely

one or two phantom-like files of workmen making their way to the pit. Still she remained on the threshold, shivering with cold and watching the opposite cottages across the strips of gardens. The door of the suspected cottage opened, and Catherine's curiosity increased. But it was only the Pierrons' little girl, Lydia, who was going to work.

The noise of the kettle boiling over made Catherine start. She closed the door quickly and ran to the fire-place, but too late to prevent the hissing and steam of the water running on the burning coal. There was no fresh coffee, so that she was obliged to use the grounds of the day before, which she did, throwing the moist sugar into the coffee-pot as she poured the water in. At that moment her father and brothers came down.

"My eye," said Zachariah, having put his nose into his bowl, "that won't keep the sleep out of our eyes."

Maheu resignedly shrugged his shoulders. "Never mind, it's hot at any rate, and it isn't half bad." Johnny had gathered up the crumbs of the sandwiches, and was making himself sops. Catherine, after having drunk her share, emptied the remainder of the coffee-pot into the men's tin cans. The whole four kept standing in the yellow glimmer of the flickering wick, gulping down their drink in a hurry.

"Are we going, or are we to live on our incomes?" asked the father.

A voice came from up stairs through the open door. It was the mother's. "You had better take all the bread. I'll make shift for the children with some vermicelli I've got."

"All right, mother," shouted Catherine in answer. She settled the fire afresh, and put a small pipkin of soup on the hob for the grandfather when he came in at six. Then they all took their clogs from under the sideboard, put their heads through the string of their coffee cans, and unbuttoning their jackets, stowed the "sandwich brick" inside them, but right between their shoulders. The men went out first, the girl bringing up the rear, after she had blown out the candle and turned the key in the lock. The house became silent and dark once more.

The lights disappeared one by one in the miners' village; there was a final banging of doors, and then every thing became quiet. The women and the little ones resumed their sleep in the more roomy beds; and from the village, plunged into gloom once more, to the Voreux pit, where the lurid flames leaped into the sky, black with scurrying clouds, there descended slowly a long phantom-like file of pitmen going to

their work, rolling along with a gait peculiar to themselves; their long arms crossed on their chests, the "sandwich brick" on their backs, making them look like an army of hunchbacks. Though shivering beneath their well-worn linen suits, they went not the quicker; they loitered on the way like a flock without a sheep dog—like a herd without the herdsman.

CHAPTER III.

STEPHEN GETS WORK.

STEPHEN had plucked up courage to go to the Voreux pit, and all the men of whom he inquired about the chance of getting a job had shrugged their shoulders and told him to wait for the head viewer. He was left free to wander about the place, ill-lighted, full of black gaping holes, bewildering with its many stories and sheds. He had just ascended a dark rotten staircase leading to a rickety gangway, passed through a shed, plunged in such obscurity as to oblige him to feel his way lest he should knock up against something. Suddenly he saw in front of him two enormous yellow eyes that pierced the gloom. He was in the receiving shed, just under the head of the shaft.

A viewer, Daddy Richomme, a thick-set individual, with a heavy gray mustache and a soldier-like look, was just passing on his way to the receiver's office. "You're not in want of a workman here who don't mind putting his hand to any job?" asked Stephen once more. Richomme was going to say "No," when he checked himself. "Wait for Monsieur Danseart, the head viewer," he replied, continuing his way.

Four lanterns, with their reflectors, gave the only light there was at the mouth of the shaft. They vividly illumined the iron railings, the levers, the uprights of the frame in which the two cages ran. The remainder of the vast shed, like the nave of a church, was wrapped in semi-darkness, peopled as it were by immense floating shadows. The lamp shed stood out in a bright glare at its further end, while in the office of the receiver there burned a small wick, like a star ready to disappear. The trucks were coming up again and continued their incessant rumbling across the iron floor, pushed by the banksmen, whose bodies, almost bent in twain,

threw weird elongated shadows amidst the noise and gloom of the whole.

For a moment Stephen remained motionless, bereft both of sight and hearing. He was chilled to the bone by the persistent draughts coming from every corner of the building. Then he advanced a few steps, attracted by the engine, the polished steel and burnished copper of which stood out bright from amidst the obscurity. Placed at about five-and-twenty yards to the back of the shaft, in a shed considerably higher than the other one, the engine rested so solidly and evenly on its massive bedding of brick that, though going at high pressure, with all the force of its four hundred horse power, the movement of its enormous driving-rod, plunging upward and downward with an oily softness, caused not the least vibration to the floor. The engineman, his hand on the lever, listened to the signals, keeping his eyes fixed on the indicator showing the shaft with its different stories, some conical bullets attached to strings representing the cages. And at each fresh start two enormous wheels of five yards in circumference, around the boxes of which the steel cables coiled and uncoiled themselves, whirled about so rapidly that they looked like so much gray dust.

"Look out there," shouted two banksmen who carried a gigantic ladder.

Stephen was nearly being knocked down. His eyes getting accustomed to the sight before him, he kept staring at the cables, thirty yards of steel ribbon, leaping straight into the tower of the shaft, whence, passing over some pulleys, they dropped vertically into the shaft. They were the cables attached to the cages. An iron frame-work like that of a belfry, supported the pulleys. The whole gave him the impression of a bird taking its flight without noise, without bumping. The rapid and incessant movement of the thread-like cable that could lift as much as twelve tons weight at a time, at the rate of ten yards a second, fascinated him.

"Look out there, then!" again shouted the banksmen, who were shifting the ladder to the left to look at the other pulley.

Stephen slowly retraced his steps to the receiving shed. The terrific whirl above his head had somewhat stunned him. Shivering in the draughty air he stood watching the working of the cages, but almost deafened by the rumbling of the trucks. Close to the shaft, the signal, a heavy hammer moved by a lever, pulled from below by a rope and falling upon a metal block, kept striking—one stroke to stop, two to let down, three to haul up. It was an uninterrupted series of

blows rising high above the tumult, and accompanied by the incessant sounding of gongs. The brakesman directing the maneuvers increased the noise by shouting his directions to the engineman through a speaking trumpet. And amidst this "well-ordered confusion," the cages came and went, without Stephen understanding aught of the complicated business.

One thing he understood well enough; that the shaft swallowed the men by mouthfuls of twenty and thirty at one gulp, and with such apparent easiness as to be unconscious of the fact. At four o'clock the descent of the colliers had begun. They arrived from the shed, bare-footed, lamp in hand, and waited in small groups until a sufficient number had collected. Without a sound, gliding softly from the dark depths below, the cage, with its four stories, each containing two trucksful of coal, swung silently on to the platform in front. At each landing the wheelers took out the full trucks and replaced them by empty ones, or else by some filled beforehand with wood for propping. The colliers wedged themselves into the empty trucks, five by five, as many as forty at the time, when they occupied all of them. A voice shouted through the speaking-trumpet. The signal for below, sounding "All right," was pulled to give notice of the starting of this cargo of human flesh. Then after a slight shake the cage went down silently, like a stone thrown down a well; leaving no trace behind but the shimmering, vibrating flight of the cable.

"It's deep, is it not?" asked Stephen of a collier, who still half asleep, stood close to him waiting for his turn.

"Just a little over six hundred yards," replied the man. "But there are four stoppages above that, the first one at about three hundred and fifty yards."

Both kept silent, their eyes fixed on the cable which was coming up.

"And when it breaks?" said Stephen.

"When it breaks," echoed the man. But he vouchsafed no prophecy as to the consequence of such an accident, save by a gesture more eloquent than words. His turn to go down had come; the cage was waiting. He squatted down in it with the rest. In another four minutes it reappeared for a fresh load. And so it went on for more than half an hour, during which the shaft continued to swallow its human prey, without a sound, with the same voracious silence.

At last Stephen was taken with the sickening sensation that had assailed him before. Why remain? This head viewer would send him about his business as all the others had done. Moved by some undefined fear, he made up his mind suddenly;

ne went away, and only stopped outside, in front of the boiler-room. The door which stood wide open showed the seven boilers, each with two compartments. Through the puffs of white, hissing steam he saw a stoker busy feeding one of the furnaces, the glaring heat of which came as far as the threshold. The young man, but too glad to get a little more warmth, strode eagerly forward, almost knocking up against a fresh batch of colliers on their way to the pit. They were the Maheus and the Levaques. When he saw Catherine with her good-natured, boyish look, walking in front, a superstitious idea took hold of him to risk another rebuff.

"I say, mate, they don't happen to want a workman here who'll put his hand to any thing?"

She looked at him surprised, somewhat startled, at the abrupt voice addressing her from the darkness. But her father, who was just behind her, had also heard the question. He consulted for a moment with his mates, then answered, "No; we're in want of nobody." This poor devil starving on the high road for want of a job interested him. Once out of Stephen's hearing he said to the others, "After all, we might be like that. We mustn't grumble. Every one hasn't work to starve on."

The gang made straight for the waiting shed, a large barn roughly whitewashed, and with padlocked lockers all around it. In the middle stood an enormous iron fire-place, a kind of stove without a door, glowing with a tightly wedged mass of incandescent coal, a block of which fell now and then upon the beaten earthen floor. There was no other light but this immense brazier, the fitful shadows of which kept up a mad dance on the grimy woodwork and the ceiling hidden beneath a layer of black dust.

A loud burst of laughter greeted the Maheus on their entrance. About a score and a half of colliers were standing about with their backs to the fire, roasting themselves, with an air of thorough enjoyment. They all came there before going down "to take a stock of heat between their skin and their flesh against the moisture below," as they expressed it. But this morning they were more than usually gay; they were chaffing La Mouquette, a trammer girl of about eighteen, whose somewhat redundant proportions showed too conspicuously in the masculine garb of trowsers and vest. She lived at Requillart with her father, old Mouque, a stableman, and her brother, Mouquet, a banksman. Only their hours of work not being the same, La Mouquette, emancipated from all surveillance, indulged too freely in her propensity of gadding

about, and not always with the same sweetheart. The joke at present was that she had been seen with a nailer from Marchiennes. It was the easiest way to get the girl in a fury, for, with a laudable *esprit de corps*, she swore that she would be ashamed to give her arm to any but a collier.

Nevertheless the hilarity subsided. The girl was telling Maheu that Fleurance, tall Fleurance, would come to work no more. She had been found the night before lying stark and stiff on her bed. Some said it was heart disease, others a liter of gin gulped down at a draught almost. Anyhow, it vexed Maheu, who cursed his bad luck at losing a trammer girl without being able to replace her immediately. He worked at piece work; he, Zachariah, Levaque, and Chaval. If they had only Catherine to fill and run the trucks they would get behindhand. Suddenly an idea struck him. "And this man who was looking for a job?" he said.

Just then Danseart was passing through the shed. Maheu told him the story, and asked leave to take the man on; he insisted upon the wish expressed by the company for some time already, to gradually replace the girls by men, as had been done at Anzin. The head viewer could not help smiling, because the idea of excluding the women from below was generally distasteful to the colliers, who were anxious to find work for their daughters, undeterred by considerations of morality and health. At last, after some hesitation, Danseart consented, but on the express condition of having his decision ratified by M. Négrel, the engineer.

"You'd better catch your man first; he's far away by this time," said Zachariah.

"No, I saw him stop at the boiler-room," replied Catherine.

"Very well, run along then," shouted Maheu.

The young girl took to her heels, while a batch of men came up from the pit, leaving the place to the others. Johnny did not wait for his father; he went to get his lamp in company with his chum, Bébert, a pale, moon-faced boy, and Lydia, a weakly-looking lassie of twelve. Just in front La Mouquette was yelling at them on the dark staircase, calling them a set of dirty brats, and threatening to slap their faces if they kept on pinching her.

Stephen was standing inside the boiler-room talking to the stoker, who was feeding the fires. He shivered at the idea of having to go out into the cold night again. Nevertheless, he had just made up his mind to do so when he felt some one touch him on the shoulder.

"Come along," said Catherine, "we've got you something to do."

At first he did not understand; then, overcome with joy, he squeezed her hand very hard. "Thank you, mate, you're a good sort, you are."

Catherine burst out laughing, looking at him in the red glare which fell upon them both. It tickled her fancy to be mistaken for a hobbedehoy, because her back hair was tied up under her handkerchief. He also laughed, glad to have found some work, and so they remained face to face for a moment, their cheeks glowing with the heat of the fire.

In the shed, Maheu squatted in front of his locker, taking off his clogs and his coarse woolen stockings. When Stephen came in, the matter was settled with a few words; thirty sous per day, hard work, but he'd soon learn. The pitmen advised him to keep on his shoes, and lent him an old cap made of stiff leather, intended to protect the head; a precaution which the father and the children disdained. The tools were taken out of the locker; it just happened that the tommy-spade of Fleurance was amongst them. Then, when Maheu had put away their clogs, their stockings, as well as Stephen's bundle, he grew impatient of a sudden.

"What's he messing about for; this brute of a Chaval? Talking to a girl in some corner, I'll take my oath. We're half an hour behind this morning."

Zachariah and Levaques were quietly roasting themselves before the fire. The son spoke at last.

"Are you waiting for Chaval? He's gone down long ago."

"Why the devil didn't you say so before. Come along; look sharp then."

Catherine who was warming herself, reluctantly followed. Stephen let her go before him. Again he found himself in a maze of dark passages and staircases, along which the patter of bare feet produced a kind of muffled sound, as of list slippers. But suddenly they came upon the lamp room, a kind of glazed shed full of racks in which were ranged hundreds of Davy lamps, cleaned and examined the evening before, and shedding their light like so many wax candles in a chapel decked out for a funeral. At the wicket every man took his own lamp, perforated with his number; he examined and locked it himself, while the timekeeper, seated at a table, inscribed the hour of going down in his time book. Maheu had to interfere for the lamp of his new trammer. Then there was still another formality to be gone through; the men had to pass before an inspector, who made sure that their lamps were locked.

"Hang it! it's none too warm here," said Catherine, shivering.

Stephen simply nodded. He found himself once more in the receiving shed, before the shaft in this enormous barn, swept by the bitter draughts. He did not feel a coward; nevertheless, an uneasy sensation almost choked him, as he listened to the rolling thunder of the trucks, the incessant beating of the signal hammer, the muffled sound of the speaking trumpet; as he watched the endless motion of the cables coiling and uncoiling themselves round and off the drums of the engine. The cages came and went with the stealthy glide of the nocturnal prowler in the jungle, gulping down the men who only seemed so much food and drink for the black jawed monster. It was his turn now; he felt cold, and though he kept silent, he showed that he was nervous. His attitude provoked a jeer from Zachariah and Levaque, who both disapproved the "taking on" of this stranger—especially Levaque, who felt hurt at not having been consulted. Noticing their hostility, Catherine felt pleased at her father trying to explain things to the young man.

"Look," said the miner, "do you notice this gear above the cage. That's a saving apparatus; iron cramp hooks, that bite into the uprights of the frame in case of an accident. Does it work? Not always. Yes, the shaft is divided into three compartments boarded in from top to bottom; the cages in the middle to the left."

But he interrupted himself to grumble, without, however, raising his voice.

"What the devil are we waiting for? Are we to stand here till we are frozen to death?"

Richomme, the viewer, who was also waiting to go down, his ordinary lamp stuck in his leather cap with a nail, heard him grumble.

"Softly; the walls have ears," he said good-naturedly, like a man who remembered that he had been one of their own class. "They can't do two things at once. Here we are; get in the lot of you."

In fact the cage with its large iron bands and close wire netting was waiting for them standing square on the bolts. Maheu, Zachariah, Levaque, and Catherine, got into a bottom truck, but as it had to hold five, Stephen had to wedge in also. The best corners were taken, however, so he had to hug close to the young girl, whose elbows stuck into his ribs. His lamp seemed to embarrass him; they told him to fasten it to the button-hole of his jacket, but he did not hear them, and he

kept awkwardly fumbling with it. The loading of the trucks with their human cargo continued above them; there was evidently some delay at which Maheu grew impatient. At last a slight shock, and every thing became confused to Stephen. The objects around him seemed to leap into the air, while he himself felt a painful sensation as of falling down, as one feels in a dream. This lasted while he was descending the two stories of the receiving shed, amidst the whirl and noise, but when they got into the gloom of the shaft itself, he felt like stunned, without the least perception of any thing.

"Now we are off," said Maheu quietly.

They all were at home there. He was asking himself every now and then whether they were going down or up.

When the cage descended straight without touching the guide ropes or uprights, it seemed to him that it remained motionless. When, on the other hand, it bumped, however slightly, he feared an accident. Besides he could not distinguish the wall of the shaft from behind the close network against which he had stuck his face. The lamps shed but a faint light on the heap of human bodies at his feet. Only the ordinary lamp of the viewer in the next truck flashed out clearly like a beacon.

"This one has something like four yards and a half of diameter," said Maheu, continuing his information to Stephen, and alluding to the shaft. "It is sadly in want of being tubbed afresh, for the water leaks in from all sides. There, we are getting to a streak, do you hear?"

Stephen was just asking himself what this sound of falling water meant. Some large drops had splashed on the top of the cage like the beginning of a shower; and now the rain increased, pouring down in a continuous stream like a veritable deluge. There was no doubt a hole in the roof of the cage, for in a few moments he was drenched to the skin. The cold became glacial; they were sinking deeper and deeper into the dank gloom when all of a sudden there was a glare, the vision of a cavern where some men were moving about in a flash of lightning. They had started again.

"That was the first level," said Maheu. "We are at about three hundred and fifty yards from the top. Look how quickly we are going." Raising his lamp he threw its light on one of the uprights of the frame, which flew past like a rail under a train going at full speed. Beyond that one could see nothing. Three more levels were passed, and the same momentary flash revealed the men at work. The rain kept coming down in torrents.

"How deep it is," murmured Stephen. Their descent must have lasted for hours. He felt cramped by his awkward position. Catherine's elbow was torturing his ribs, and he dared not stir. She had not spoken a word, he only felt her against him, keeping him warm at any rate on that side. When the cage got to the bottom at last he was surprised to hear that the descent had taken just one minute. But the grinding of the bolts, the sensation of having solid ground under his feet once more made him very lively of a sudden, and he began to chaff Catherine, addressing her with the familiar "thou."

"What hast thou beneath thy skin to be as warm as that? I have thy elbow in my ribs assuredly." Then she burst out laughing also. What a fool he must be to take her for a boy. Where were his eyes? "Thou'st got my elbow in thine eyes," she said, amidst a fresh outburst of laughter, for which the young man still failed to account.

The cage was disgorging its load, the men crossed the landing vault, cut out in the rock, and coated with strong brickwork. Three ordinary lamps were burning in it. On the iron floor, the truckmen were rolling the full trucks about. A kind of cavernous smell oozed from the walls, whiffs of fresh saltpeter mixed with the heated air coming from the adjacent stables. Four galleries showed their black and gaping openings.

"This way," said Maheu to Stephen. "You are not there yet; we've got another mile and a half to go." The men divided in groups and disappeared in the darkness. About fifteen took the gallery to the left, Stephen came last, behind Maheu, in front of whom were Catherine, Zachariah, and Levaque. It was a fine gallery reserved for the haulage, cut across the rock, and so solid as to scarcely require walling in. One by one they advanced, without a word, guided by the light of their lamps. The young man stumbled at each step, knocking his toes against the rails. He was getting uneasy again at a muffled sound which he had noticed for the last few minutes, the distant noise of the storm, increasing in violence, and which seemed to come from the bowels of the earth. Was it the thunder of a slip bringing down upon their heads the enormous mass that separated them from the light of day? A sudden flash pierced the surrounding gloom; he felt the rock shake, and when, like his mates, he stood aside against the walls, he saw passing close to him a big gray horse pulling a long line of trucks. On the first, holding the reins and driving, sat Bébert, while Johnny ran barefooted behind the last, holding on by its back with his hands.

They started once more. Further on there was another open space whence radiated two new galleries. The party divided once more; the men were slowly getting distributed all over the mine. At this point the haulage gallery was walled in; rough-hewn wooden props of a dullish yellow supported the roof and provided the bowlderous rock with a kind of coating, from behind which one perceived the layers of schist glistening with mica and the rougher mass of dull, rugged sandstone. Long trains of trucks, full or empty, were continually passing and crossing each other, rumbling like a distant thunder clap. They were drawn by animals of indistinct form, gliding by in a phantom-like trot. On the double-railed siding, a long black serpent lay asleep, it was a train that had been shunted; its horse, neighing and shaking its mane in the prevailing gloom, looked like an enormous block of stone, just become detached from the overhanging vault. Two ventilating doors opened and closed lazily. And as they advanced the gallery became narrower, lower of ceiling, sinuous, compelling them to stoop almost continuously.

Stephen knocked his head violently. But for his leather cap, his skull had been split. He was, nevertheless, closely watching the slightest movement of Maheu, who was in front of him, and whose somber outline stood out against the light of the lamps. Not any of the others knocked themselves; they seemed to know every nook and crevice, every bulge of the rock. The young man suffered also from the slippery ground, which was getting more sodden as they went. At some spots they had to wade knee-deep through pools of mud and slush. But what surprised him still more were the abrupt changes in the temperature. At the bottom of the shaft it felt very fresh, and in the haulage gallery, through which came all the air of the mine, there was an icy blast blowing like a storm every now and then in the narrower parts. As they advanced into the other galleries which only had their bare share of ventilation, the blast subsided, the heat increased until it became suffocating and as heavy as lead. On they went for more than a quarter of an hour through these twisted bowels of the earth, closing round them as it were at every step, until at last they found themselves surrounded by an impenetrable gloom, which blinded one and took one's breath away.

Maheu had not uttered another word. As he was entering a new gallery, he said to Stephen, without turning round, "This is the William seam." It was the seam where their cutting was situated.

At the first steps Stephen knocked his head and his elbows. The sloping roof came down so low as to compel them to advance on all fours for twenty and thirty yards at the time. They were ankle deep in water. Stephen felt choked, for the heat became unbearable. They advanced about two hundred yards, when suddenly he saw Levaque, Zachariah, and Catherine disappear. They seemed to have taken flight through a narrow fissure opening in front of him.

"You must get up," said Maheu. "Sling your lamp to your button-hole and hold on by the cogging."

He himself disappeared and Stephen could but follow him. This opening left in the seam was intended solely for the miners. It was, as it were, the high road to the smaller passages. Its width was equal to the thickness of the coal bed in that spot, about twenty-five inches at the most.

Luckily the young man was lean enough; for being very awkward at that kind of exercise, he hoisted himself up with difficulty, making himself as small as possible, and holding on by the pinning. At the end of about sixteen or seventeen yards, they came upon the first of the smaller passages. But Maheu's cutting came only sixth in rotation, "in the very fangs of hell," as he himself expressed it; and at every score of yards the passages were cut one above the other. There seemed no end to the ascent across this crack that broke one's back and one's chest. Stephen gasped for breath, as if the whole weight of the rocks was crushing him. His hands were bleeding, the flesh of his legs was torn; and, above all, he felt the want of air; his veins were swelling ready to burst. He perceived in an adjacent passage the blurred outlines of two figures stooping down—a thin and a stout one. They were La Mouquette and Lydia propelling their trucks. And he had still to climb up two cuttings higher. His perspiration blinded him; he began to despair of coming up with the others, whose bodies he heard rubbing against the rock with a rustling sound.

"Courage; we are there," said Catherine's voice.

Just as he was getting up with them, he heard another voice from the back of the cutting.

"This is lively work, indeed. I've got a mile and a half's walk from Montsou, and I'm the first on the spot."

It was Chaval—a tall, lank, bony fellow of five-and-twenty. He was in a rage at having had to wait. When he perceived Stephen, he asked, with a kind of contemptuous surprise "What's this?"

And when Maheu had told him the story, he muttered

between his teeth, "It's come to this, then; the men taking the bread out of the girls' mouths."

The two men exchanged a look full of that instinctive hatred that blazes up suddenly. Stephen had felt the insult without having understood. There was a dead silence and every one set to work. The mine was full at last, every cutting occupied, from the lowest to the topmost. The shaft had devoured its daily ration of humanity; seven hundred workmen burrowing like so many ants. And amidst this profound silence, one might have heard, by putting one's ear to the rock, the working of these human insects, from the gliding noise of the ascending and descending cage to the sound of the pick biting into the coal at the bottom of the furthest cutting. Stephen, on turning round, found himself once more close to Catherine. But this time he was no longer mistaken.

"But you're a girl," he murmured, taken aback.

She, without the least embarrassment, without the slightest blush, answered, "Of course I am; you've found it out at last."

CHAPTER IV.

CATHERINE'S HOSPITALITY.

THE four miners had stretched themselves at full length, one above the other across the front of their cutting.* Separated from each other by boards driven into the seam itself by means of pointed wedges; they each occupied about five yards of the vein, which was so thin in this particular spot as to leave them scarcely any space between the roof and the wall. They had to crawl along on their knees and elbows; they were unable to turn round, save by bruising their shoulders; they had to strike the seam lying on their sides, their necks twisted anyhow, their arms uplifted and wielding the short-handled pick obliquely.

At the bottom, nearly level with the floor, lay Zachariah; Chaval and Levaque were above him, and at the very top was Maheu. Each one began by striking at the bed of schist,

* In order to explain to the reader who has some experience of coal-mining in this country, the apparent incongruities, I beg to state that the conditions of mining differ materially in various countries.—TRANSLATOR.

which ran through the seam; he riddled it with his pick; then, when the layer had been loosened below, he made two vertical cuts and at last drove a wedge into the top part. The coal was soft, the block broke into pieces, dropping on the miner's legs and chest. The board arrested all further progress until the coal formed a heap around the man, who almost entirely disappeared in the opening he had made.

It was Maheu who suffered most. Up there the temperature became unbearable; there was not a whiff of air, suffocation seemed almost imminent. He had been obliged to hang his lamp on a nail above his head; its heat scorched his skull. But his martyrdom was still further aggravated. At a few inches above him the water oozed from the rock; large drops fell with an obstinate rhythm on the self-same spot. Do what he would, he could not avoid their beating on his face and running down his neck. At the end of a quarter of an hour he was drenched, and, what with the heat, steaming like a boiler. One particular series of drops in his ear made him swear. He would not give over; his strokes became more violent, they made the rock itself shake, while he himself ran the risk of being crushed between it, like a fly between the leaves of a book.

They did not exchange a syllable. Nothing was heard but their irregular blows, muffled as if coming from a distance—weirdly sonorous blows falling upon the dead atmosphere without producing an echo. The overhanging gloom seemed to become more dense, laden as it was with the flying coal-dust, its unknown depths unrelieved by aught save the reddish flicker of the safety lamps behind their wire gauze cylinders. Every thing looked blurred; the cutting opened and ascended like a flat chimney built obliquely instead of vertically and wherein the accumulated soot of a dozen winters had turned every thing to an impenetrable and deep gloom. Figures more like specters than like human beings were moving in it; the rounded outline of a hip, the angular form of a bony elbow, the profile of a motionless head, begrimed as if to baffle detection for a contemplated crime, were visible now and then, but nothing more. At intervals some faint glimmers of reflecting crystal flashed from the tumbling mass of coal. Then every thing became black again, the picks continued their heavy, muffled blows, to the panting accompaniment of the oppressed chests, to the rattle of the deep-drawn breath gasping with fatigue in the foul air and the never-ceasing downpour of water.

Zachariah, still limp from the effects of the over night's

spree, soon gave over on the pretext of pinning. It enabled him to indulge a snatch of soft whistling while vacantly staring at nothing in particular. More than three yards of the seam remained unsupported behind the hewers without their having taken the precaution to prop the rock, indifferent as they were to the danger and anxious to save their time. "You young swell there," shouted Zachariah to Stephen, "just hand me up some pins."

Stephen, who was just taking a lesson from Catherine how to use his tommy-spade, had to carry some pins into the cutting. There was still a little stock of the day before. As a rule, a provision of them, cut to the measure of the vein, was taken down every morning.

"Look sharp about it then, you d—— slow coach," sneered Zachariah, maliciously enjoying the awkward way in which the new hand hoisted himself up, embarrassed by the four oaken pins he held in his hands.

With his pick Zachariah made a notch in the roof, another in the wall, and wedged the two ends of the pin into them and thus propped the rock. In the afternoon the quarry men picked up the wood left by the hewers in the galleries and cogged the seams of the bed worked at, only leaving free the inclined planes and the principal ways, so as not to interfere with the haulage.

Maheu had left off panting. He had managed to loosen his block, and was wiping the perspiration from his face. He was worrying at Zachariah having come up behind him. "Leave that alone just now," he said. "We'll see after breakfast. Better get the coal down if we want to have our number of trucks."

Zachariah told him he was afraid of a slip. But his father simply shrugged his shoulders. "It wouldn't be the first time either, and we'd get out of it like before." At last he got angry and told his son to mind his own business.

They were all fuming and fretting. Levaque lying on his back, cursed and examined his bleeding thumb. A bowlder of sandstone had fallen on it. Chaval was stripping himself to the waist, he could not stand the heat; they were already as black as niggers, covered with the coal-dust, which the perspiration converted into an ointment. Maheu was the first to begin work again, his head low down against the rock. But the water kept so obstinately dropping in the self-same place that he felt as if it were drilling a hole in the bone of his skull.

"Don't mind them," said Catherine to Stephen; "they're always bellowing like that."

And she continued to give him his lesson in a good-natured, easy way. Each filled truck got to the top as it left the seam marked with a special check, so that the receiver might put it to the account of the right gang. Great care was therefore needed to fill it properly and take none but the right coal, else it was refused at the receiving shed.

The young man, whose eyes were getting accustomed to the darkness, kept looking at her, pale still with her chlorotic complexion; he could not have told her age, he took her to be about twelve, she seemed so slight and slim. Nevertheless he felt that she was older from her boyish unconcern, from her unsophisticated effrontery, which somewhat embarrassed him. She did not please him; he thought her wan, clown-like head, swathed in its blue handkerchief, rather too rakish. But what surprised him above all was the strength of this child, a strength in which skill went for much. She filled her truck much quicker than he did, using her tommy-spade dextrously in a quick and regular way. After which she propelled it as far as the inclined plane with a slow but sure hand, without stumbling or knocking against any thing, passing with the greatest ease under the lowest rocks, while he hurt himself, went off the rails, and blundered about in a most distressing manner.

Truth to tell, the way was not an easy one. It measured about seventy yards from the cutting to the inclined plane, and not having been enlarged by the quarrymen as yet, it was scarcely wider than a drain pipe, not to mention its unequal roof and continuous bulges. At certain spots there was just room enough for the filled truck to pass, provided he bent low over it, putting all his propelling strength into his knees, so as to avoid breaking his skull. The props and pins were giving way already. Along the walls they were bent in the middle with long gaping cracks, like crutches too weak to support their weight. One had to be careful not to tear one's flesh with the enormous splinters, and under the slow rattling downward of the oaken logs, large, like a man's thigh, one had to crawl along on one's stomach, haunted by the ever present fear of hearing one's backbone crack beneath the falling mass.

"What, again?" said Catherine laughing.

Stephen's truck had gone off the rails at the most awkward spot. He could not manage to push straight on those rails, going anyhow in this sodden ground; and he swore to himself, got angry, and struggled with the wheels, which, in spite of his impotent efforts, he could not get into their place again.

"Just wait a minute," said the young girl. "Don't get impatient, or else you'll never manage it." And with a clever backward movement she slipped half under the truck, lifting it by sheer force on to the rails again. It weighed over seven hundredweight. And he, surprised, ashamed, uttered awkward apologies.

She had to show him every thing, how to use his feet, his legs, his arms, how to support himself against the propping to get a fulcrum. During one journey he meekly followed her, watching intently as she advanced almost on all fours, taking advantage of the inequalities of the ground, like a well-trained mule on the edge of a precipice. She also perspired and panted, felt her joints crack sometimes, but uttered no complaint. She had become callous from habit, as if the common lot of her class could bring no other fortune than to live like this, bent in twain. And he, in spite of every thing, did not succeed in doing that much; his shoes embarrassed him; he suffered a martyrdom at being obliged to advance with his head almost touching the ground. At last he could hold out no longer, and was compelled to kneel down, in order to rest his weary limbs, and to catch his breath.

At the inclined plane a new torture was in store for him. At the top and the bottom of this plane, which ran past all the cuttings from one story to another, there was a truller; a brakesman at the top, a receiver at the bottom. These young scamps of about twelve or thirteen exchanged the most dreadful language between them at the top of their voices, and to make one's self heard by them one had to shout louder than they. Hence, the moment there was an empty truck, the receiver gave the signal, the trammer girl started her full one, the weight of which pulled up the other when the brakesman lifted his brake. At the bottom in the haulage gallery were put together the trains which the horses pulled to the bottom of the shaft. "I say you young brutes," shouted Catherine along the propped plane, more than a hundred yards long, and through which her voice vibrated as through a gigantic speaking trumpet, "I say, you young brutes, look out there."

The trullers were no doubt taking it easy, for no one answered. The haulage was stopped along the whole of the line. At last the fluted voice of a little girl piped a few words with reference to La Mouquette at which the whole of the lot burst out laughing. But suddenly the brakesman bellowed from above to make ready to start. A viewer had passed, no doubt. The haulage was resumed on all the nine stories. For some moments nothing was heard but the regular cries of

the trullers, and the husky voices of the trammer girls. And at each journey Stephen found the same suffocating air rising from the bottom of the cutting, the same muffled cadence of the picks, the same muttered curses and panting of the hewers, remaining obstinately at work. All four had stripped; all four were confounded in one blurred mass begrimed with a black greasy slush up to their eyes. A little before Maheu had to be dragged out, more dead than alive, almost with the death rattle of suffocation in his throat. The boards had to be removed to let the blocks of coal slip on to the ground. Chaval and Levaque were swearing at the seam which, according to them, became harder and harder. In that case they would decidedly have a bad bargain of it. Chaval turned round, lying flat on his back, to yell at Stephen, whose presence seemed to exasperate him.

"Look at that flabby brute, who hasn't got the strength of a girl. Will you make haste and fill your truck, or do you want to skulk the work, to save your elbow grease? D—— my eyes, see if I don't dock you ten sous if we get a truck sent back."

Stephen did not answer him. Too glad to have found some work, he meekly submitted to the brutal superiority of the master workman. But he felt unable to stir another step, his legs were bleeding, his limbs felt broken, his whole body seemed crushed, as if confined in a belt of iron. Luckily it was ten o'clock, and the men made up their minds to get their breakfast.

Maheu had a watch, but he had no need to look at it. Amidst this starless night he knew the time almost to a minute. They all put their shirts and vests on. Then descending the cutting they squatted down on their hams, their elbows close to their flanks, in the attitude so habitual to miners as to make them independent, even outside the mine, of chairs or any other support. And each one taking out his "brick" bit into it gravely and with earnestness, only exchanging a monosyllable now and then with reference to the work of the morning. Catherine, who had remained standing, ended by joining Stephen, who had seated himself further down across the rails, his back against a prop, in the only dry spot there was to be found.

"Why don't you eat?" she asked, her mouth full, her "brick" in her hand. Then she suddenly remembered Stephen wandering about in the dark night, without a penny, without a bit of bread, no doubt.

"Will you share with me?" she said.

But seeing that he refused, assuring her that he was not hungry, while his voice shook with the ravenous want of food, she continued, chaffingly, "If you are afraid to eat after me —But, look here, I have only bitten this side, I am going to give you the other."

She had already broken the "brick" in two. The young man took his share, only preventing himself by the greatest effort from not devouring the whole, there and then, without stopping. He put his hands on his thighs so that she should not notice their trembling. She, with her tranquil air of good-fellowship, stretched herself flat on her stomach by his side, her chin resting on one hand, holding her "brick" with the other. The light of their lamps placed between fell full on her face.

Catherine looked at him for a moment in deep silence. She thought him handsome, with his finely cut features and soft black mustache. Without knowing why, she smiled with pleasure.

"So you're an engineman, and they sacked you at the railway works. Why?"

"Because I slapped my overseer's face."

She was dumfounded; all her hereditary ideas of subordination, of unmurmuring obedience, were upset.

"I'm bound to say that I had been drinking," he went on; "and when I drink it drives me mad. I'd eat myself and I'd eat the others. Yes; I can't take two small drops without feeling that I must eat somebody. And then I am ill for two or three days afterwards."

"You shouldn't drink," she said seriously.

"No fear; I know myself too well."

And he lifted his head; he had an insuperable hatred to brandy, the hatred of the last descendant of a race of drunkards whose flesh still suffers from all the hereditary effects of alcoholism to a degree that the least drop becomes poison to him.

"It's on account of my mother that I am sorry having been sent away," he said, after swallowing another bite. "My mother is very badly off, and I sent her a five-franc piece now and then."

"Where is she, your mother?"

"In Paris; she is a laundress; she lives in the Rue de la Goutte d'Or."

There was another silence. When he thought of all those things his dark eyes became dim; it was the ever-recurring anguish brought on by the recollection of the wrong done to

him. For a moment his looks wandered vacantly into the impenetrable gloom of the mine, and from its depths he conjured up a vision of his infancy. He saw his mother, still young and active, deserted by his father, then taken back again after being married to another, living between the two men who devoured her earnings, sinking deeper and deeper with both into the abyss of vice—of drunkenness. It was yonder in Paris, but the particulars came back to him. The soiled linen lying in heaps in the shop, and the smell of drink that pervaded the house, and the fights that resulted in black eyes and broken noses.

"I shan't be able to make her many presents out of thirty sous a day," he resumed slowly. "She will clem to death, I'm sure."

He shrugged his shoulders in a fit of despair, and took another bite from his "brick."

"Will you drink a drop?" said Catherine, uncorking her coffee can. "Oh, it's coffee, you needn't be afraid: it will do you no harm. It chokes one to eat without drinking."

But he refused. It was quite enough that he had taken half of her bread. She, however, insisted so good-naturedly that, when she held out her flask, after having put it to her mouth first, he could but take it. She had changed her position. She was now on her knees quite close to him, her face lighted up by the yellow flicker of the two lamps. What had made him think her ugly at first? Now that her face was covered with the finely-powdered coal dust, it appeared to have a singular charm. In the dusk surrounding them, the teeth of the somewhat too large mouth gleamed pearly white, her eyes seemed to have become larger and flashed greenish, like the eyes of a cat; a lock of the red hair that had escaped from under the handkerchief tickled his ear and made him laugh. She did no longer appear so young to him; she might be as much as fourteen after all.

"I'm sure you're too kind," he said, putting the flask to his mouth and handing it back to her.

She took a second draught and compelled him to follow her example, "being determined to share and share alike," she said. And the flask going from hand to hand and mouth to mouth amused them. He suddenly asked himself whether he ought not to reward her kindness with a kiss. The lips seemed tempting enough, but he dared not venture, suddenly becoming timid in the presence of an honest work-girl.

"You must be about fourteen," he said, after another bite at his bread.

She opened her eyes very wide and seemed almost vexed. "Fourteen indeed, I'm over sixteen. It's true I'm not very stout. Girls don't grow very quickly with us."

He continued to question her, and she told him every thing in the most natural tone, without reticence, without effrontery. Though chaste enough herself, she did not pretend to ignore any thing of what was going on around her in the morally as well as physically vitiated atmosphere. Stephen himself felt this to be the case. When, in order to tease her, he referred to La Mouquette, she told him the most dreadful stories without being aware of the incongruity of such tales coming from a young girl's lips. And when he asked her whether she had no sweetheart, she answered him that she would not displease her mother, but that sooner or later she would do like the rest and take up with one. She had become very listless, and was shivering in her thin linen clothes, dank with perspiration. She seemed to have no energy to resist or to command, only resigned to submit and to obey as she had been taught, or rather as she taught herself, guided by surrounding circumstances.

"Because," she continued, "there are always lots of sweethearts, living as we do."

"Besides, there's no harm in it, as long as one don't tell the priest," said Stephen, with a slight sneer.

"The priest, the priest; who cares for the priest? One only cares for the 'Black Man,'" observed Catherine.

"Who's the 'Black Man'?"

"The old miner who comes back now and then to the mine, and who twists the necks of all the bad girls," came the answer.

"And you believe in those cock-and-bull stories? Don't you know better than that?"

"Indeed I do, for I can read and write; and it comes very useful at home, for in father and mother's time they didn't teach these things."

Stephen began to think that she was very pretty indeed. When he had finished his "brick" he would give her a kiss to thank her for her kindness. Still he felt embarrassed and timid, not knowing how she might take it. He would not like her to think it a liberty. He felt both attracted and awkward with this young girl in men's clothes. He took another draught from the flask and handed it to her to empty it. It would not do, however, to kiss her in the presence of any body. So he kept uneasily glancing to where the miners squatted, when a shadow suddenly interrupted his view.

It was Chaval's, who stood upright and looked at them from the distance. He advanced and turned round to make sure that Maheu was not looking. Catherine had remained seated, so he took her by the shoulders, threw back her head and gave her a smacking kiss, affecting a perfect unconcern of Stephen. The kiss was, as it were, a notice of possession, a kind of jealous challenge.

The girl tried to resist. "Leave me alone, do you hear?" she said. But he did not let go hold of her. He kept her head betwixt his hands looking her full in the face. His red beard and mustache flashed as it were from his blackened face, rendered more repulsive still by a large hook nose. At last he let her be and went away without a word.

A kind of chill had come over Stephen. It was stupid to have waited so long. He would certainly not kiss her now, for she might think that he wished to do as the other had done. His pride had been hurt; he felt desperately angry.

"Why did you tell me a falsehood?" he said in a low voice. "He's your sweetheart."

"Indeed he isn't," she exclaimed. "I'll swear to it. We're nothing to each other. He likes his joke now and then. He doesn't even belong to these parts. He only came from the Pas-de-Calais six months ago."

Both had got up. They were going to resume work. When she saw him so serious she seemed pained. No doubt she thought him much nicer than Chaval, and would have preferred his kiss perhaps. The idea of doing something to please him seemed to preoccupy her, and as the young man was examining his lamp, the flame of which burned blue with a large pale halo round it, she tried to amuse him.

"Come along, and I will show you something," she said, in a wheedling tone of voice.

When she had taken him to the furthest end of the cutting, she pointed to a crevice in the coal. A slight boiling, hissing noise escaped from it, like the whistling of a bird.

"Put your hand there; do you feel the draught? That's fire damp."

Stephen stood thunderstruck. This terrible something that blew up every thing was there, unseen, barely felt, scarcely heard. She laughed, and said that there must be a great deal of it about to-day to make the lamps burn so blue.

"When you've done jawing, you idle vagabonds!" shouted the rough voice of Maheu.

Catherine and Stephen made haste to fill their trucks, and pushed them to the inclined plane, their backs straightened.

crawling along under the propped-up roof of the passage. At the second journey they were wringing wet again, and their bones cracked with their efforts. In the cutting the hewers had resumed work. They often hurried their breakfast so as not to get too chilled; and their "bricks" crammed down with a silent voracity, lay like real ones in their stomachs. Lying at length on their sides they struck their hardest, with one idea uppermost in their minds—to make a good day's work of it. Every thing disappeared in this furious craving for gain accomplished so painfully. They no longer felt the water that drenched their limbs and swelled their joints; they no longer felt the cramps begotten of their contortions, different, and still always the same amidst this dense gloom where they withered like plants buried in a cave. As the day advanced the air became more foul, more over-heated with the smoke of the lamps, with the pestilence of the vitiated atmosphere, with the asphyxiating emanations from the blowers, weighing on their eyelids like gigantic cobwebs, and which could only be got rid of by a return to the fresh night breeze. But while beneath the mother earth, scarcely able to breathe, like a toad in a hole, they continued to strike their hardest.

CHAPTER V.

THE ENGINEER'S THREATS.

MAHEU, without looking at his watch, which he had left in his waistcoat, stopped in the midst of his work, and shouted, "It's close upon one o'clock, Zachariah. Have you almost finished?"

The young man had only resumed pinning a few moments since. He had wasted his time, lying flat on his back, staring about vacantly, and chewing the cud of his over night's spree. His father's voice startled him. He got up. "Yes; as much as will do until to morrow," he said.

And he took his place in the cutting, while Chaval and Levaque also put down their picks to get a moment's rest. They all wiped their faces, trickling with perspiration, on their bare arms, looking up at the rock above them, the masses of schist of which were cracking. They never talked of any thing but their work.

"Just like our luck; we couldn't have got worse if we had tried," muttered Chaval, alluding to the chances of a slip in their cutting. "They didn't allow for it in the bargain."

"A set of thieves," grunted Levaque; "they only try to best us."

Zachariah burst out laughing. He did not care a jot about the work or about any thing else, but liked to hear the company abused. In his quiet way, Maheu began to explain that the nature of the ground changed at every twenty yards. They should be fair; no one could foresee this. And seeing that the others went on inveighing against the masters he became uneasy, and kept looking round. "That'll do; hold your tongues," he said.

"You're right," replied Levaque, also lowering his voice; "it can only make things worse."

The fear of spies, of eavesdroppers, haunted them incessantly, even down below, as if the coal of the shareholders, while still in the seam, was possessed of ears.

"Never mind," said Chaval in a loud and defiant tone; "if this swine of a Dansaert speaks to me again as he did the other day I'll split his skull. I don't interfere with him when he goes dangling after certain women with fair hair and soft skin."

This time Zachariah burst into a loud guffaw. The love adventures of the head viewer with "a certain woman with fair hair and soft skin," as Chaval expressed it, were the common topic of conversation in the pit. Catherine herself, resting on her spade at the bottom of the cutting, held her sides with laughter. In a few words she explained the allusions to Stephen, in spite of her father, who was getting very angry and scarcely concealed his fear of their being overheard.

"D—— it all, do hold your tongue," he said to Chaval. "Wait till you are by yourself if you're absolutely bent upon getting into mischief."

He was still speaking when a light step was heard in the gallery above. Almost immediately the engineer of the pit, "Little Négrel," as he was called among the workmen, appeared at the top of the cutting, accompanied by Dansaert, the head viewer.

"Didn't I tell you so?" whispered Maheu. "One might think they spring from the earth."

Paul Négrel, nephew to M. Hennebeau, was a young man of about twenty-six, lithe and good-looking, with curly hair and dark mustaches. His thin, aquiline nose and bright

eyes gave him the appearance of an amiable ferret, keenly intelligent, but with a kind of unbelief in the better qualities of man. This skepticism with regard to every one changed into an over-bearing authority with the workmen. He was dressed like the others, begrimed with coal dust, and to compel their respect he affected a dare-devil pluck, squeezing himself through the narrowest holes, always in front when a slip or explosion occurred.

"This is the cutting, isn't it, Dansaert?" he inquired.

The head viewer, a Belgian with a heavy face, thick sensual nose and lips, answered obsequiously. "Yes, M. Négrel, this is the man they took on this morning." Both had gone as far as the middle of the cutting. They made Stephen come up. The engineer lifted his lamp to the young man's face and looked at him without saying a word.

"That'll do," he said at last. "I don't like strangers being picked up on the high road like that. Above all, don't let it occur again."

He did not even pretend to listen to the explanations offered to him, the necessity of not being short of hands, the wish to replace the women by men for the haulage. He was attentively studying the look of the roof, while the hewers took up their picks again. All at once he said:

"I say, Maheu, are you playing the fool with people? You'll all be smashed to atoms."

"Oh, it's solid enough," answered the collier, quietly.

"What do you mean, solid enough? But the rock is moving already, and you put your props at two yards from it, nilly-willy, as it were. It's of no use, you're always the same. You'd have your skulls smashed rather than give over work for an hour to do the proper thing. Be kind enough to see to it at once. Double the props, do you hear?" And confronted by the ill-will of the workmen who objected, saying that they could look to their own safety, he got downright angry.

"Don't talk to me. When your heads are staved in you'll not have to bear the consequences. It's the company who'll have to pension you or your wives. I tell you I know all about you; you'd sell your skins to have two truck loads of coal extra."

Maheu, notwithstanding his rising anger, said calmly enough, "If we were better paid, we'd prop better."

The engineer simply shrugged his shoulders, he was already at the bottom of the cutting, where he concluded, "You've got an hour to do it in. Set about it, all of you; and I warn you that you are fined three francs."

A suppressed growl from the colliers was the only answer vouchsafed to the engineer. The force of established dominion was making itself felt unconsciously. They yielded to this unwritten military discipline, which, from the small truller boy to the head viewer himself, kept them all in check. Nevertheless, Chaval and Levaque sprang to their feet with threatening gestures, which Maheu condemned with a simple glance, while Zachariah shrugged his shoulders in a way that expressed as much contempt for his comrades as for the retreating superior. The one most affected by the scene was Stephen, perhaps. He stood quivering with rage. Ever since he had come down this inferno a feeling of revolt had taken possession of him. He looked at Catherine, who, with an air of mute resignation, and almost bent in twain, was plying her spade again. Yes, it was but too true; these people were killing themselves day by day in this dreadful gloom for a mere crust of bread, which they did not always get. Meanwhile, Négrel went away with Dansaert, who thought it necessary to approve the engineer's measure by a prolonged nodding of the head. Suddenly their voices were heard again. They had stopped once more to examine the propping of the rolling way, the care of which, as far as ten yards behind their cutting, devolved upon the hewers.

"I tell you that they don't care a curse for any body," exclaimed the engineer. "And, d—— it all, you don't seem to care any more than they do, else you'd look to it."

"But I do look to it," apologized the head viewer. "Only I am tired of telling them."

"Maheu! Maheu!" shouted the engineer.

They all came down, and he continued:

"Do you call that solid enough? It looks like nothing at all. You stint the props to save your time. Look at that cap, with the monkey giving way as fast as possible. Of course you don't give yourself the time to do it properly. And all at once the whole lot comes down and the company is put to double expense. But what does it matter to you. So that it lasts while you have the responsibility, the rest may go to the devil."

Chaval wanted to speak, but the other cut him short. "I know what you're going to say. Let the company pay us better. But I'll tell you what you'll force the company to do in the end. You'll be paid for your propping, but it will come to the same in the end; because they'll lower the price of the trucks. We'll see whether you'll be any the better off. Meanwhile, look to this at once, for I'm coming down to-morrow."

And before the men had time to recover from their astonishment at his threat, he was gone. Dansaert, so cunningly polite with him, remained behind a few moments to bully the workmen. "I've got you to thank for this row," he shouted: "but I'll be even with you yet, and three francs fine will be a flea-bite to it; so look out for yourselves." And when he was gone Maheu burst out in his turn, "Hang it all, fair is fair. I like to keep calm, because it's the best way: but they'd make a saint swear. Did you hear? The price of the trucks lowered and the propping paid apart. That's another of their games to dock our earnings." And he continued cursing to himself, looking round meanwhile for some one to vent his rage upon, when he noticed Catherine and Stephen, who had dropped their spades.

"You just hand me some props. Does it concern you? Come on, look sharp, or else I'll make you."

Stephen obeyed him without a word. He himself felt so angry with the masters that he did not mind a bit what was said to him. On the contrary, he thought the men angels of patience.

Chaval and Levaque were letting off steam in a choice selection of curses. But all, Zachariah included, set to propping. For full half an hour nothing was heard but the stroke of the adze. They did not exchange a word, they only panted and puffed, swearing against the hardness of the rock, which they would have upset and bodily carried away, if sheer desperate strength could have accomplished the task.

"That'll do," said Maheu at last, absolutely broken down with anger and fatigue. "Half past one. We'll have a nice day's work; we won't have fifty sous apiece. I'm going. I've got enough of it." And though it wanted another half an hour to the time for leaving off, he dressed himself. The others followed his example. The very sight of the cutting seemed to exasperate them. Seeing that Catherine and Stephen had resumed work, they called out to them, rating them for zeal. If the coal had feet, it might get to the top by itself for what they cared.

And the six, their tools under their arms, went away, having still nearly two miles to trudge to the bottom of the shaft, by the same road they had taken that morning.

When they came to the air-shaft Catherine and Stephen fell behind, while the colliers slid down to the lower gallery. They met with little Lydia, who stood aside to let them pass, and who told them that La Mouquette had suddenly disappeared, taken with such a violent bleeding of the nose that she

had gone somewhere to slush her face, no one knew where. When they left her, the lassie went back to her truck, pushing it with all her might, panting, covered with mud, her thin arms and legs, the whole of her frail body straining to her task, like a tiny black ant under a load too heavy for it. They also slid down on their backs, rounding their shoulders lest they should leave some of their skin, and they went so quickly down the incline of the rock, polished as it were by the daily contact of so many bodies, that they had to hold on now and then by the props, "lest they should take fire," as they expressed it.

At the bottom of the gallery they found themselves alone. Some red points, like incandescent stars, disappeared at a bend of the way. Their hilarity had subsided, they walked with dragging steps, she in front, he behind. Their lamps were carbonizing; he could scarcely see her, wrapped as she was in a kind of smoky mist. The idea of her being a girl annoyed him, because he felt it stupid on his part not to have kissed her; the recollection of the other having done so in his stead vexed him still more. While his head was almost resting on her shoulders in order to avoid knocking it against the roof, he persuaded himself that she had told him a falsehood. Yes, this man was her lover, it could not be otherwise; she looked as if she were no better than she should be. Without the least justification he sulked with her, as if she had really deceived him. She, on the other hand, turned round at every step, warning him of some obstacle and inviting him, as it were, to be amiable with her. At last they got into the main gallery; he felt a relief from the indecision which racked him; she looked pained and dull. And now the underground life became very active around them. There was the constant coming and going of the viewers, the incessant rumbling of the trucks, drawn along at a trot by the horses. Lamps were flickering in the gloom in all directions. Every now and then they had to stand back close against the rock to make way for men and beasts whose elongated shadows they perceived on the opposite wall, whose panting breath fanned their faces. Johnny, running barefooted behind his train, shouted some coarse, spiteful joke to his sister, which was lost in the rumbling of the wheels. They kept on, she silent, he not recognizing the landmarks of the morning, and fancying that she had lost her way and was leading him deeper and deeper below the earth. He suffered terribly from the cold, an icy cold that had settled on him when he came out of the cutting, and which made him shiver more and more as he drew near the shaft. In the

narrow passages a bitter blast blew like a hurricane. He felt as they would never get to their journey's end, when suddenly they came to the bottom of the shaft.

Chaval cast a sidelong glance at them, his mouth firmly set with an air of mistrust. The others were there soaking wet with perspiration, standing in the icy draught, mute like himself, only uttering inarticulate growls. They were before their time; they were not allowed to go up for another half hour, the rather as there was some complicated maneuvring going on in order to let down a horse. The men were still despatching the trucks with a deafening noise of clanking iron; the cages flew upward, disappearing in the beating rain which poured down the black hole. At their feet, the sump, a kind of shallow well of about ten yards in circumference, was getting full, and emitted its dank vapors. And around it the men kept continually moving, pulling the signal ropes, working the levers amidst the drizzle that drenched them to the skin. The reddish glow of three common lanterns played fitfully on these gigantic restless shadows, and gave this underground hall the look of some brigands' cavern, with its forge set close to a torrent.

Maheu made another attempt. He went up to Pierron who had "come on" at six o'clock.

"Never mind; do let us go up."

But the young man in charge of the cage, a strapping, handsome fellow, with a good-natured face, refused, with a frightened look.

"Impossible; ask the viewer. They'd fine me if I did."

Two or three more growls, and then they kept silent, while Catherine bent forward to where Stephen stood and whispered, "Come and see the stables; it's nice and warm there."

They had to get away unnoticed, for they were not allowed to go into them. They were situated at the end of a short gallery to the left. About thirty yards long and five high, cut in the rock and walled in with brick, they could hold twenty horses. Catherine was right; they were nice and warm, with the gentle heat of animal life, and the healthy smell of fresh litter, properly attended to. The solitary lamp burned peacefully, like a well-trimmed nightlight. The horses turned round with a kind of childish curiosity and turned as lazily to their fodder, like well-cared for, healthy laborers worthy of their hire, and petted by every one. But while Catherine was reading aloud their names, painted on zinc labels above their hay-racks, she uttered a low cry, seeing a body suddenly uprising before her. It was that of La Mouquette, who had sud-

denly jumped from the straw on which she had been sleeping. On Monday, when she felt tired from her Sunday night's dancing, she generally dealt herself a punch on the nose, left her cutting on the pretext of fetching some water, and snugly ensconced herself in the warm litter with the animals. Her father, who had a kind of weakness for this saucy young damsel of his, winked at her proceedings at the risk of getting himself in trouble.

Just then Daddy Mouque came in. Short, bald, worn-out, he had managed, nevertheless, to keep his corpulence, which is sufficiently rare with an old miner of fifty years' service. Since they had made him stableman he had chewed to such a degree that his gums bled in his black mouth. When he saw the two others with his daughter he got angry.

"What the devil do you want in here, you? Quick, out with you, you and your young man. Get you gone, and at once, or else I'll make you."

La Mouquette thought it great fun that her father should fall foul of Catherine and the young man, and held her sides with laughter. But Stephen felt confused, and went away at once, while Catherine smiled at him. The three were returning to the bottom of the shaft when they met Johnny and Bébert in charge of a long line of trucks. There was a stoppage in the working of the cage, and Catherine went and stroked their horse, talking of it to her companion. She told him that this was Bataille, the equine dean of the mine, a gray horse that had been ten years down below. During that time he had lived in this hole, occupying the same corner in the stables, accomplishing the same task every day along these black galleries, without ever having seen daylight again. Very fat, his coat very smooth, looking the picture of good nature, Bataille seemed to lead the calm existence of a philosopher, unaffected by the trials of his species in the open air. Besides, the constant gloom had made him very sharp. The road which he worked had become so familiar to him as to present not the least difficulties or surprises. He pushed open the ventilating doors with his head, he lowered the same at the turnings where there was a chance of knocking it against the roof. He no doubt counted his journeys, because, when the regulation number had been performed, he refused to stir, and they were obliged to take him back to his hay-rack. Still, old age was creeping over him; his eyes were becoming dim and sad now and then. Perhaps he had vague recollections of his birth-place, the mill near Marchiennes, on the river's bank, surrounded by grass and corn-fields, and open to the winds of

heaven. Something was burning high above him, an enormous lamp, the exact shape of which escaped his memory. At such moments he lowered his head and stood trembling on his legs, vainly trying to remember the sun.

Meanwhile, the maneuvring went on in the shaft; the signal hammers had struck four blows; the horse was being let down. The event always produced a certain excitement, for it happened sometimes that the animal was taken with such fear as to be dead when landing. At the top when put into the net, the present victim had kicked most desperately; but when the solid earth disappeared suddenly from under its hoofs the poor brute was like petrified; it did not move; it remained without a shiver, only its eyes started almost from their sockets. Being too big to pass between the guides, they had been compelled to strap its head to its flank, in order to sling it under the cage. The descent lasted nearly four minutes; the engine revolved very slowly so as not to frighten the animal more than was necessary. Below the excitement grew very intense. Were they going to leave the poor beast suspended in the deep gloom? the workmen asked each other. But it came at last, motionless, like a block of stone, its large eyes dilated with terror. It was a three-year-old bay horse, named Trompette.

"Look out, there," shouted Daddy Mouque, standing ready to receive it. "Don't untie him yet."

Trompette was deposited on the iron flooring, where he lay like a lifeless mass. He did not move for some time, unable to shake off the horrid nightmare of this dark hole, of this hall wrapped in gloom, ringing with a to him terrific noise. They were beginning to unstrap him, when Bataille, who had just been unharnessed, drew near and stretched out his neck to have a good sniff at this new companion, dropped from the earth as it were. The workmen drew back and widened the circle round the two animals. Bataille seemed to like the smell of this stranger, and kept on sniffing in spite of the spectators' chaff. There was something new, and yet familiar about the scent. It reminded him no doubt of the grass, of the sun which every now and then he vaguely remembered in his dreams. And suddenly he set up a joyous whinnying, musical, yet as tender as a long-drawn sob. It was his welcome, his vouchsafed thanks for a recollection of bygone times; it was a melancholy plaint on the fate of this new prisoner who would never see daylight again.

"Look at that old Bataille," cried the workmen, put into

good humor by the gambols of their favorite. "He is talking to his new mate."

Trompette, entirely unstrapped by this time, kept very still. He remained lying on his flank, paralyzed with fear, as if he still felt the network around him. At last they got him on his legs, stunned, a violent shiver shaking his every limb. And Daddy Mouque led away the two animals, who remained side by side, fraternizing no doubt.

"Well, are we all right now?" asked Maheu.

They had to readjust the gear of the cages, and besides, it still wanted ten minutes to the time for going up. The miners kept flocking in from all directions. There were already more than fifty waiting, shivering and drenched to the skin. They suffered most from the cold; the winds blew from every where and the men kept growling. Pierron notwithstanding his good-natured looks, slapped his girl's face because she had left off too early. Zachariah took to pinching La Mouquette to keep himself warm. But the discontent increased visibly. Chaval and Levaque told their mates of the threats of the engineer, the price of the trucks to be lowered, and the propping paid apart. The news was received with growls and curses; a revolt was evidently brewing in this narrow corner more than six hundred yards below the earth. In another minute the voices grew louder and louder; those men, begrimed with coal, frozen with waiting, accused the company of killing half their workmen in the mine, and with starving the other half to death at the top. Stephen was listening; the men's excitement had communicated itself to him.

"Make haste, look sharp," repeated Richomme, the viewer, to the men in charge of the cages.

He was hurrying them on, pretending not to hear in order not to be obliged to act. Still the noise became such as to necessitate his interference. Behind him some shouted that things could not go on like this forever, and that one fine morning the whole concern would be blown up. "You who are a man of sense, make them hold their tongues," he said to Maheu. "Those who are not over-strong should be over-patient."

But Maheu, who was calming down, had no need to interfere. Suddenly the voices were hushed. Dansaert and little Négrel, returning from their tour of inspection, had just turned into the main. They were drenched like the others. The habit of discipline made the men stand aside while the engineer quietly crossed their ranks. He merely made a motion that he wanted to go up, and Pierron, who had mysteri-

ously disappeared during the row, rushed forward at once. Little Négrel seated himself in one truck, Dansaert in another; the signal sounded four times to give notice of "swell meat coming up," as the workmen expressed it, and the cage ascended amidst a melancholy silence.

CHAPTER VI.

STEPHEN MAKES UP HIS MIND.

ONCE in the cage that took him up, Stephen, huddled in a truck with four others, like so many cattle, resolutely made up his mind to resume his starving course along the high roads. One might as well die of hunger there and then as go back to this inferno, which afforded not even a crust of bread. Catherine had had to find room in a truck above him, and, truth to tell, he missed her companionship. He preferred not to dwell upon these things, because with his more liberal education he could not imitate the resignation of this herd; if he tried, it would surely end in his strangling a chief or an overseer some day.

Suddenly he felt like blinded. The ascent had been so rapid that he was stunned by the light of day, his eyes wincing at its glare, from which they had already become estranged. Nevertheless he felt a great relief at hearing the cage swing on to the bolts of the platform. A banksman opened its doors; the colliers jumped from the trucks.

"I say, Mouque," whispered Zachariah to the young banksman, "I'll see you to-night at the Volcano."

The Volcano was a music-hall at Montsou. Young Mouque winked his left eye with a silent grin that split his mouth from ear to ear. Short and stout, like his father and sister, his snub nose and his general saucy look gave him the air of a youngster who spent every farthing he earned without taking thought for the morrow. Just at that moment La Mouquette jumped down also, and he dealt her a smacking slap on the back as a token of fraternal love.

Stephen scarcely recognized the high roof of the receiving shed, which he had only seen by the indistinct flicker of the lanterns. It looked bare and grimy. The light of a gloomy winter's day filtered with difficulty through its windows

coated with mud. At its far end the engine with its polished brass, looked as bright as ever; the steel cables, well greased, flew up and down like ribbons dipped in ink; the pulleys up above, the enormous frame that supported them, the cages, the trucks, this lavish quantity of metal with its harsh grayish tints of old iron, made the shed look more somber still. The rumbling of the wheels shook the iron flooring without cessation, while from the coal rolling to and fro there ascended a finely-powdered dust that blackened the floor, the walls, and even the cross-beams of the roof.

Chaval, who had gone to look at the check-board in the glazed box of the receiver, came back furious. He had discovered that two of their trucks had been refused, one because it did not contain the regulation quantity, the other because its contents were dirty.

"It only wanted that to complete our day's work. Another twenty sous gone to the devil. That comes of taking a lot of lazy brutes who use their arms like a pig does its tail."

And his sidelong glance at Stephen emphasized his allusion. The latter itched to give him his answer straight on the nose. Then he asked himself what would be the use, seeing that he had made up his mind to go.

"One can't be perfect all at once," said Maheu. "To-morrow he'll get on better."

Nevertheless the whole lot felt aggravated, seeking for a quarrel with some one. As they crossed the lamp shed to give up their lamps, Levaque began to bully the man in charge, whom he accused of neglecting to clean his. They only recovered their equanimity when they got into the shed, where the fire was roaring in the stove as bright as ever. It was red-hot and the place seemed in flames, the leaping shadows of the latter licking the walls, as it were. Then there were short staccato grunts of satisfaction, while they stood with their backs to the blaze, steaming away like caldrons of soup. When their backs were sufficiently roasted they turned round. La Mouquette, unabashed by the presence of the men, made herself more comfortable still. They simply laughed; the novelty of her proceedings had worn off.

"I'm going," said Chaval, suddenly, after having stowed away his tools in his locker and taken his clogs.

No one answered save La Mouquette, who followed close upon his heels, somewhat embarrassed in her progress by sundry articles of her attire not being fully adjusted. Catherine, seemingly very preoccupied, was talking in a low voice to her father. Maheu looked surprised, but approvingly nodded

his head. Then he called to Stephen to come and take his bundle.

"Look here," he whispered; "if you haven't any money, you're likely to be dead before you get your fortnight's pay. Would you like me to find you 'tick' somewhere?"

The young man felt somewhat confused for a moment. He was just going to ask for his thirty sous and proceed on his way. But he felt ashamed before the young girl. She was looking him full in the face. She might fancy that he wanted to skulk the work.

"I can promise you nothing," continued Maheu; "we can try, and they can only say nay."

And Stephen did not refuse. The landlord was sure to say no; and, besides, he was not bound to remain if he said yes. He could have a chat, eat a morsel of something, and go away afterwards. Then, noticing Catherine's evident satisfaction, her pretty smile, her friendly look of gladness at having come to his aid, he felt angry with himself for having consented. What was the use of it all?

The colliers, after having warmed themselves and put their clogs and stockings on, went away one by one. The Maheus and the Levaques locked up their tools and went away in Indian file. But as they were crossing the sifting staith a violent quarrel caused them to stop.

It was an enormous shed, with beams blackened by the flying coal dust; it was open to all the winds, notwithstanding the rough latticed shutters, a kind of primitive Venetian blinds which, if any thing, increased the draughts. The trucks arrived direct from the receiving shed, and the men tilted their contents into the troughs, a kind of inclined plane made of sheet iron, to the right and left of which the sifters, standing on steps and armed with spades and rakes, kept back the shale and pushed down the coal, which, passing once more through large funnels, dropped into the wagons on the railway underneath the shed.

Philomena Levaque, looking pale and thin, with the signs of her pulmonary disease strong upon her, was there among the sifters. Her head tied up in a blue woolen rag, her hands and arms, as far as the elbows, begrimed with coal dust, she was standing just below an old hag, Pierron's mother-in-law. La Brulée (the Scorched One), as they called her, was terrible to look upon, with her eyes like those of an owl, and her tight-set lips, drawn close like the strings of a miser's purse. The two were quarreling violently, the young woman accusing the crone of throwing her the stones, so that she could not fill a

corf in ten minutes. They were paid by the piece; hence the frequent rows. They tore each other's hair, they left the imprints of their five black fingers on each other's faces.

"Why don't you stow her ribs," shouted Zachariah from where he was standing to Philomena.

There was a roar of laughter on the part of the sifters. But the old woman turned like a tigress on Zachariah.

"You, you filthy brute, you'd better look after your two brats instead of interfering."

Maheu had to keep back his son, who wanted to go down to twist the old crone's neck. Just then an overseer appeared on the spot, and the women resumed their work. In another moment there was a sloping line of rounded backs, bending over their owners' tasks.

Outside the wind had suddenly abated; a cold drizzle fell from the leaden sky. The colliers tucked their heads between their shoulders, flung their arms across their chests, and with that peculiar roll that made them look all angles in their thin linen clothing, went away by twos and by threes. Under the lowering sky they looked like a band of niggers having been ducked in a quagmire. Some of them had not finished their "bricks," and the remnant of bread brought back between their shirts and their vests gave them the look of being hump-backed.

"There comes Bouteloup," sneered Zachariah.

Levaque, without stopping, exchanged a word or two with his lodger, a strapping, handsome, dark fellow of about thirty-five, with a good-natured and open face.

"Is the soup ready, Louis?"

"I think so."

"Then missus is in a good temper to-day?"

"Pretty well, I think."

A lot of quarrymen arrived in successive gangs, which, one after the other, were swallowed up by the pit. It was the three o'clock shift, which replaced the miners that were doing piecework. The mine never stood still; day and night the human insects were burrowing the rock, six hundred yards below the turnip fields.

Meanwhile the lads had gone on in front. Johnny was propounding to Bébert a complicated scheme to get four sous worth of tobacco on trust, while Lydia kept respectfully at a distance. Catherine followed with Zachariah and Stephen. Neither of them spoke a word. It was only in front of the tavern, the Good Luck, that Maheu and Levaque came up with them.

"Here we are," said Maheu to Stephen. "Will you come in?" They separated. Catherine remained perfectly still for a moment, casting another glance at the young man from her greenish, limpid eyes, their transparency still heightened by the black face in which they were set. She smiled and disappeared with the others up the slope that led to the miners' village.

The tavern was situated between the pit and the village, at the cross-roads. It was a two-storied house of brick, whitewashed from roof to doorstep, except for the sky-blue borders running round every window. On a square sign-board, nailed above the door, was painted in yellow letters "The Good Luck, kept by Rasseneur." At the back there was a narrow yard, bounded by a quickset hedge. And the company, which had done every thing to buy this strip of ground, wedged into its own vast property, looked with impotent despair at this drinking shop standing there defiantly at the very door of the pit.

"In with you," repeated Maheu to Stephen.

There was the small front room, chill and bare, with its whitewashed walls, its dozen chairs, its three tables, its deal counter, no bigger than a kitchen dresser. It scarcely held a dozen mugs, three bottles of cordial, a water bottle, a small pewter cistern, with a brass tap for the beer, and that was all. No pictures, no chess board, no game of any sort. In the iron fireplace, brightly blackleaded, there burned a small coal fire. On the brick floor, a thin layer of white sand absorbed the moisture of this country so overrun with water.

"A mug of beer," said Maheu to a stout fair girl, whose fat face was pitted with the smallpox. "Is Rasseneur at home?"

The girl, while giving him his beer, nodded affirmatively. Slowly the collier drank half his mug at a single draught to get rid of the coal dust that obstructed his windpipe. He offered none of it to his companion. Only one other customer was there, a damp and grimy collier, seated at a table and sipping his beer silently, apparently lost in deep meditation. A third came in; he was served at a nod; he put down his money and went away without uttering a word. A stout fellow of about thirty-eight, his round jolly face closely shaven, came from the back, smiling good-naturedly. It was Rasseneur, an old hand, whom the company had discharged in consequence of a strike in which he had borne a part. A very good workman with a fluent tongue, he put himself forward at every disagreement between the masters and the men, and ended by becoming the leader of the malcontents. His wife

was already keeping a liquor shop like many of the miners' wives, so when they sacked him, he turned host himself, found some one to advance him the capital, and set up right in front of the Voreux pit, like a challenge to the company. His business prospered; it had become a center, and he himself was growing fat on the discontent which little by little he had fomented among his former comrades.

"This is a lad I have taken on this morning," explained Maheu at once. "Can you give him a room, and will you trust him till pay day?"

The large round face of Rasseneur suddenly took an expression of mistrust. With one glance he took in Stephen from head to foot, and without troubling himself to say that he was sorry, he answered:

"My two rooms are taken; it's impossible."

The young man expected this refusal; it pained him, nevertheless. He himself was surprised at the sudden annoyance which the idea of having to go caused him. But for all that, he would go when he had his thirty sous. The miner who had been drinking by himself at a table had left. Others came and went one by one, washing down their throats and lurching away. It was a simple cleansing process without enjoyment, indulged in stolidly, the mute satisfying of a want.

"Then there's nothing new?" suddenly asked Rasseneur in a significant tone. Maheu was sipping the remainder of his beer. He looked round and saw that no one but Stephen was there.

"There's that much new that there's been another row; yes, there has, on account of the propping."

He told Rasseneur all about it. The landlord turned very red, his blood seemed to be rushing to his brain, trying to burst his veins and to spirt from his eyes on the way. At last he thundered forth:

"Well, if they try to lower the pay, they are done for."

Stephen's presence made him uncomfortable. Nevertheless he continued to speak, casting sidelong glances at him. But there were hints, and broken sentences. He spoke of Hennebeau, the director, of his wife, of his nephew, little Négrel, without naming them, only repeating every now and then that things could not go on like this—that the whole would come to grief one fine morning. The misery had become too great; he named the works that had closed, the workmen who were gone or going. For the last month he had given away more than six pounds of bread a day. He had been told the night before

that M. Deneulin, the proprietor of an adjacent pit, did not know how to meet his engagements. Besides, he had just received a letter from Lille, full of very disquieting news.

"You know," he whispered, "it comes from the individual whom you saw here the other evening."

But he was interrupted. His wife, a tall, thin, excitable-looking woman, with a long nose and purplish cheeks, had just come in. She was much more radical in her political opinions than her husband.

"Yes, Pluchart's letter," she said. "If he were master, things would get along a little better, and that before long."

Stephen had been listening for the last few minutes. He began to understand, and became excited at the thought of all this misery and the revenge it must necessarily bring. This name uttered quite loud and so abruptly made him start. He said almost unconsciously, "I know him, Pluchart." They all looked at him. He felt bound to add, "I am an engine-man, and he was my foreman. A very able man. I have often chatted with him."

Rasseneur began to examine Stephen anew. This time there was a sudden expression of sympathy on his face. At last he said to his wife, "It's Maheu who has brought monsieur, one of his trammers, to know if there isn't a room vacant up stairs, and if we would like to trust him for a fortnight."

After that the matter was settled with a few words. Yes, there was a room; its tenant had gone away that very morning. Stephen could have it with pleasure. And Rasseneur, very excited by now, opened his mind freely, repeating all the while that he was only asking what was fair from the masters, without, as some did, clamoring for the impossible. His wife shrugged her shoulders. She wanted her due absolutely; nothing else.

"Good night," interrupted Maheu. "All this won't stop our going down, and as long as there are folks going down, so long will there be folks who'll leave their skins there. Look at you; you are a different man since the last three years."

"Yes, I have picked up wonderfully," replied Rasseneur, patronizingly.

Stephen went as far as the door, and thanked the departing collier, but the latter simply nodded his head without saying a word, and the young man watched him painfully toiling up the slope that led to the village. Madame Rasseneur, busy serving some customers, came to ask him to wait for a few minutes, and she would herself take him up to his room

where he could have a good wash. Was he to stay? Doubt beset him once more; a nameless feeling of regret for the freedom of the high roads, even at the hunger suffered under the open sky, with the consciousness of being his own master, seemed to come over him. He felt as if he had lived here for years from the time he came in the bitter blast to the hours passed in the bowels of the earth, crawling on his stomach like a serpent along the dark galleries. And he was loth to recommence this life; it was too unjust and too cruel. His manly pride revolted at the idea of being a beast of burden, shut out from the sun always, crushed to atoms every now and then.

While Stephen was debating with himself, his eyes, which were wandering across the plain, gradually began to distinguish things. He was astonished. He had not pictured to himself the horizon in that way when Jollycorpse had pointed it out to him in the gloom. True enough there was the Voreux pit lying in a hollow before him; there were the buildings of brick and of wood; there was the sifting shed, coated with pitch; there was the top of the shaft, with its slated roof; the engine-room, and the tall slender chimney, with its pale reddish color, the whole huddled together, crouching down like a beast of prey assuredly. But around the buildings the landscape spread far and wide—he did not think it so large—changed, as it were, into a lake of pitch, with its mounds of coal topped by the skeleton platforms and sleepers for the rails of the various gangways; encumbered in one corner by the piles of props, looking like a forest fallen beneath the ax of the woodman. To the right the view was interrupted by a mountain of shale, colossal like a barricade thrown up by giants, and already covered with sprouting grass in some of its older parts, consumed at the other end by an interior fire which had been smouldering there for the last twelve months, and was emitting dense columns of smoke, while the top was made more hideous still by the grayish masses of schist and sandstone, riddled with long tracks of bloodlike rust. Then further on the corn and turnip fields, bare at this time of the year, rolled away in endless waves, to be lost among the arid marshes, their monotony scarcely relieved by a few stunted willows. Further still was the distant plain, with its long thin lines of lank, lean poplars. At the furthest end a few whitish spots denoted the configuration of towns: Marchiennes to the north, Montsou to the south, while the forest of Vandame to the east bounded the horizon with the violet line of its leafless trees. And under the leaden sky of

this winter's afternoon it seemed to Stephen that all the grime of the Voreux pit, all the flying coal dust, had settled on the plain, covering the trees, bestrewing the roads and penetrating the soil.

Stephen kept on looking, and what surprised him above all was a waterway, the Scarpe, made into a canal, which he had not noticed on the previous night. From the Voreux pit to Marchiennes it went straight, like a frosted silver ribbon, six miles long, an avenue bordered by large trees, constructed high above the lower grounds, and unrolled itself into the endless distance, with its perspective of grassy banks, of the pale gray stream, whereon glided the crimson sterns of the sailing craft. Near the pit was the landing stage, with its moored lighters, filled directly by the trucks passing over the gangways. After this the canal made a bend, cutting across the marshes, and the whole life of this treeless, bare plain seemed contained in this geometrical waterway, traversing it like a high road, and carrying on its surface the treasures of coal and iron.

Stephen's eyes wandered from the canal to the village built on the top of the slope, and of which he could only distinguish the red tiles peeping in regular lines over the grassy knoll by the side of the road. Then his glances sought the Voreux pit once more, but stopped at the long undulating heap of clay with its two enormous stacks of bricks, molded and baked on the spot. A loop line of the company's railway passed lower down, relieving the traffic of the pit. The quarrymen had, no doubt, all gone down by this time, for only one wagon, propelled by a couple of shunters, emitted a sharp screech now and then. The mystery of last night's gloom, the rumbling of the inexplicable thunder, the flashing of unknown stars had ceased. In the distance the blasting and coke furnaces were burning lower in the dusky shadows of the coming night. There remained nothing but the sound of the air-pump, continuing to pant with a hoarse and prolonged gasp, the breath of the ogre escaping in grayish puffs of steam, which floated in the air, and warned him of its being insatiable as ever.

Stephen suddenly made up his mind. Perhaps he fancied that the bright limpid eyes of Catherine were looking at him from the entrance of the village yonder at the top. Or was it a waft of revolt blowing from the Voreux pit that decided him? He did not know, but he was determined to go down again into the mine, to suffer and to battle. He was vaguely thinking of the somebody to whom, according to Jollycorpse,

all this belonged; of the insatiable crouching power to whom ten thousand mortals offered their flesh and blood every day without having ever beheld it face to face.

CHAPTER VII.

A SPOILED DARLING.

THE estate of the Grégoires, "The Piolaine,"* stood about a mile and a half from Montsou, towards the east, on the road to Joiselle. It was a large square mansion, without pretensions to architectural style, built at the beginning of the eighteenth century. Of the extensive lands which formerly belonged to it there remained only about thirty hectares (a hectare is ten thousand square meters—a meter is close upon forty inches) of fertile ground, inclosed by high walls. People spoke admiringly of the orchards and kitchen gardens, which gave the best fruit and vegetables for miles and miles around. Instead of the park there was only a small wood left. The avenue of limes, a leafy vault of three hundred yards in length, stretching from the lodge gates to the very flight of steps of the mansion, was one of the wonders of these woodless parts in which, from Marchiennes to Beaugnies, one could, as it were, count the large trees.

On that morning the Grégoires had stirred about eight. As a rule they did not get up until nine. They were fond of their beds and slept soundly; but the storm during the night had disturbed them. And while her husband went outside to see whether the wind had done any damage, Madame Grégoire, in a flannel dressing-gown and slippers, repaired to the kitchen. Short and plump, bordering upon sixty, Madame Grégoire showed a kind of startled fat doll's face below her dazzling white hair.

"Mélenie," she said to the cook, "suppose you were to make some *brioche* (a cake made with milk and eggs) this morning, seeing that you have got your paste ready. Mademoiselle won't be down for another half hour, and she might like some with her chocolate. It would be a surprise."

*Derived from "piolle," itself a slang term for tenement or lodging. The origin is very doubtful. "Youngster," says Gavroche, the street Arab of Victor Hugo's "Miserables," to another street Arab. "Wellbred folk do not say lodging, but 'piolle.'"—TRANSLATOR.

The cook, a thin, lank old woman, who had been with them these thirty years, laughed.

"A surprise, indeed," she said. "Well, I've got a clear fire and the oven must be hot by this time, so it can be done. Besides, Honorine will help me."

Honorine, a girl of about twenty, who had been brought up in the family, was the housemaid. The only other servants were Francis, the coachman, who did the rough work besides, and the gardener, with his wife, who looked after the fruit, the vegetables, the flowers, and the poultry-yard. The family lived in a very simple, homely way, so every body around them was happy enough.

Madame Grégoire, who had meditated this surprise of the *brioche* while still in bed, remained in the kitchen to superintend the preliminaries. The kitchen was very large; its importance might be guessed from its scrupulous cleanliness, from the vast array of saucepans, stewpans, jars and pots, arranged in the most methodical order. It smelled of good cheer a mile off. From every rack, cupboard, and dresser, there peeped an abundance of provisions. There seemed to be enough and to spare.

"See that the *brioche* is browned nicely," said Madame Grégoire, before she went into the dining-room.

Notwithstanding the big stove, which kept up an equal temperature throughout the whole of the house, a bright coal fire was burning in the dining-room. But every thing was very plain—the large table, the chairs, the sideboard, were all in substantial mahogany, without the least ornament. Two well-stuffed, cosey, easy chairs, deep and roomy, were the only things that betrayed the tendency of the inmates to a life of comfort, to long, uninterrupted, happy hours, of slow digestion. The drawing-room was scarcely ever opened; the family felt more among themselves in the other room.

Just then, M. Grégoire came in, dressed in a rough moleskin jacket. He was as rosy and plump as his wife. Sixty, if a day, his large, honest, and good-natured features, his silver white hair, curly still, prepossessed at once in his favor. He had been to see the coachman and the gardener; there was no damage worth speaking of, only a chimney cowl blown down. He liked to go the round of "The Piolaine" every morning. The estate was not sufficiently large to give him much trouble, not too small to deny him all the joys of the landed proprietor.

"And Cecily?" he asked; "isn't she getting up to-day?"

"I can't make it out," said his wife. "I fancied I heard her stir."

The table was laid; three coffee bowls on the white cloth. Honorine was sent to look what mademoiselle was doing. She came down again immediately, suppressing her laughter, hushing her voice, as if she were still speaking up stairs.

"If monsieur and madame could see mademoiselle—she sleeps, she sleeps as sound as a little baby. It's a real treat to look at her."

The parents looked at each other with tears of affection in their eyes. Then the father said smiling, "Will you come and look?"

"Poor darling," answered the mother. "Yes, I'm coming."

And they went up stairs together. The room was the only elegantly furnished one in the house. Hung with, and upholstered in blue silk, its white enameled furniture with tiny blue lines, like every thing else in the apartment, showed the whim of the spoiled child gratified by the fond parents. Amidst the soft waves of the dazzling white linen, scarcely revealed by the light of a half-drawn curtain, the young girl slept, her head resting on her bare arm. She was not pretty; the face looked too healthy as it were; she was too well developed for her eighteen years, but the magnificent bust and arms, the splendid complexion, the auburn hair, the pert little nose between the round cheeks, made her pleasant to look upon. The coverlet had slipped down and her breath came so softly as to be scarcely audible.

"This dreadful wind must have kept her awake all night," said the mother in a whisper.

But the father held up his hand warning her to be silent. Both remained bending over their daughter, looking with adoration at this child, so ardently wished for, and which had come to them late in life, when they had given up all hopes of such happiness. To them she was perfect, not a bit too plump; on the contrary, they never thought she ate enough. And she slept on, her face against theirs without feeling the loving contact. Nevertheless, a slight cloud stole across the placid features. Then they feared that they had disturbed her, so they went away on tip-toe.

"Hush," said the father when they got to the door. "If she hasn't done sleeping we must let her be."

"As long as she likes, the poor darling," answered the mother. "We can wait well enough."

They went down and ensconced themselves in the roomy

easy chairs, while the servants, making merry over mademoiselle's sound sleep, kept the breakfast hot without grumbling at the delay. M. Grégoire had taken up the paper, madame her knitting. The room was very warm, but there was not a sound in the silent house.

The income of the Grégoires—about 40,000fr.—was entirely derived from a share in the Montsou mines. They were very fond of relating the origin of their wealth, which dated from the founding of the company itself.

At the beginning of the last century a sudden mania to look for coal had declared itself from Lille to Valenciennes. The first success of the concession holders, who were later on to found the Anzin Company, had turned people's heads. In every commune the soil was examined. Companies were started, concessions obtained in one single night. But among the most obstinate of that period Baron Desrumaux had certainly left recollections of the most heroic endurance and intelligence. During forty years he had struggled unflinchingly against the most crushing odds; fruitless researches; new pits abandoned after months of labor; slips that crushed, inundations that drowned the workmen: hundreds of thousands of francs thrown down into the earth, as it were, not to mention administrative worries, panics of the shareholders, constant battles with the territorial nobles, who refused to acknowledge the Royal grants, unless they were first of all treated with. He had succeeded at last in founding the Desrumaux, Fauquenoix, and Company, wherewith to work the Montsou concession. The first pits were yielding some small dividends, when two neighboring concessions, the one of Couqny, belonging to the Count de Couqny, and that of Joiselle, belonging to the Cornille and Jenard Company, very nearly drove him out of the field by their overwhelming competition. Luckily, on the 23rd of August, 1760, a treaty was signed whereby the three concessions were merged into one. Desrumaux, proclaimed the victor on his deathbed, could not reap the fruits of his conquests, but he died a rich man.

In those days the baron owned "La Piolaine," with its three hundred hectares of arable and grazing land. His steward was a certain Honoré Grégoire, a native of the Ardennes, the great grandfather of Léon Grégoire, the father of Cecily. When the treaty of Montsou was signed, Honoré, who had made a stocking of about fifty thousand francs, yielded to his master's advice, though trembling at the latter's unshaken and unshakable faith in the mine. He stumped up ten thousand

francs in bright crown pieces, and took a share, accusing himself silently all the while of robbing his children of that sum. And, indeed, his son Eugene received but very meager dividends. Having become somewhat too proud to follow his father's calling, he began speculating on his own account, and managed to make ducks and drakes of the remaining forty thousand francs of his sire's inheritance. But little by little the dividends grew. A new era of prosperity began with the advent to manhood of his son Felicien, who could realize the dream wherewith his grandfather, the former steward, had beguiled his infancy—the purchase of "La Piolaine," cut up into various plots; but the principal one of which, together with the mansion itself, he bought for a song, it having come into the market during the First Revolution as national property. Nevertheless the years that followed were sufficiently disastrous; real prosperity did not come back until the fall of Napoleon. And it was Léon Grégoire who benefited to an almost miraculous extent by the timid and reluctant investment of his great grandfather. Those poor ten thousand francs multiplied and multiplied with the growing importance of the company. From 1829 onwards they produced a hundred per cent.—ten thousand francs. In 1844 they produced twenty thousand francs; in 1850, forty thousand. And only two years later the dividend had risen to the astounding figure of fifty thousand francs, while the share was quoted at the Lille Exchange at a million of francs.

M. Grégoire who had been advised to sell when this enormous premium was reached, declined to listen to the advice, simply shaking his head with a paternal and benevolent smile. Six months afterwards a great industrial crisis supervened, the share fell to six hundred thousand francs. But M. Grégoire kept on smiling; he regretted nothing, for at present the Grégoires had an obstinate faith in their share. It would rise again. Heaven itself was not more to be depended upon than the mine. To this religious belief there was added a feeling of sympathetic gratitude towards a stock which for more than a century had dispensed the family from having to work like other mortals. It was like a family divinity which their egotism surrounded with a silent worship; it was their benefactor, rocking them voluptuously in their large, lazy beds; causing them to grow fat at their well-spread board. It had been like that from father to son. Why run the risk of displeasing Fate by mistrusting it? And thus there was at the bottom of their fidelity a kind of superstitious awe, the fear of the million which the share would bring melting suddenly

away, if they had been ill-advised enough to sell out and lock the proceeds in a drawer. They thought the million safer in the bowels of the earth, whence a race of miners, succeeding generations of starving wretches, drew it forth for them, a little each day, according to their wants.

Besides, prosperity showered her gifts upon the house. M. Grégoire, when still very young, had married the daughter of an apothecary of Marchiennes, a very plain young woman indeed, without a penny of her own, but whom he worshiped, and who repaid his adoration a hundredfold by making him very happy. She had, as it were, imprisoned herself in her own home, going into ecstasies over her husband, having no other will but his. No divergences of taste divided them; the same ideal of material well-being blended their ideas into one. They had lived like that for forty years in mutual worship and reciprocal kindness. It was a carefully regulated existence; the thirty thousand francs income was spent without show or noise, its surplus devoted to the whims of Cecily, whose tardy birth had for a moment disturbed the budget. Even now they satisfied her slightest wishes; there was a second carriage-horse, two more conveyances, the girl's dresses came direct from Paris. But all this only afforded them another joy; they thought nothing too good for her, though they themselves had such a horror of any thing like personal display that they still dressed in the fashion of their youth. Every expense that did not benefit her seemed waste to them.

The door flew back abruptly, and a strong voice exclaimed:—

"Ha, na! at breakfast without me."

It was Cecily, just jumped out of bed, her eyes still moist with sleep. She had simply pinned up her hair and wrapped a white flannel dressing-gown round her.

"Indeed, dear, we are not at breakfast. Don't you see that we are waiting for you?" said the mother. "The wind prevented your sleeping last night, poor darling."

The young girl looked at her mother in great surprise.

"There has been a storm, then?" asked the girl. "I know nothing about it. I haven't stirred."

They all thought this very funny, indeed, and laughed outright. The servants who brought the breakfast in burst out also. The idea of mademoiselle doing her twelve hours of sleep straight off the reel enlivened the household. The sight of the *brioche* added to the general hilarity.

"The *brioche* is baked, is it?" repeated Cecily. "That's a surprise intended for me. It'll do me good to eat it smoking hot with the chocolate."

They had seated themselves round the table, the chocolate simmered in the bowls, the *brioche* was the only topic of conversation for the next few minutes. Melenie and Honorine remained in the room to supply particulars about its baking, to watch the others stuffing, their lips moist with the butter, and to say every now and then, "that it was a real pleasure to make pastry for masters who enjoyed the eating of it so much."

All at once the dogs set up a loud barking. They thought that it was Cecily's music mistress, who came from Marchiennes every Monday and Friday. There was also a professor of literature engaged for the young lady, whose teaching was being wholly done at home, amidst a blissful ignorance, diversified now and then by childish petulance or whim. When a question proved too much for her, she simply flung her school book out of the window.

"It's M. Deneulin," reported Honorine, who had gone to see.

Immediately behind them aid came M. Deneulin, a cousin of M. Gregoire. Though considerably over fifty, his close-cropped hair and big mustache were black as jet. Noisy, swinging his arms about, he entered the room without ceremony. One could not have mistaken the old cavalry officer; the gait and the free-and-easy way spoke of the stable.

"It's only me; how do you do? Pray don't get up," he said; and, without further ado, he took a chair and made himself at home, while the family resumed their breakfast.

"Any thing new?" asked M. Gregoire.

"Not any thing," Deneulin hastened to reply. "I have been out for a ride, and as I was passing the house I looked in to see how you were."

Cecily inquired after his daughters Jane and Lucy. They were all right: the one did not stir from her easel while the other practiced from morning to night at the piano, cultivating her voice. His son Maurice was soon to have his captaincy. Still, his high spirits did not altogether seem genuine. Every now and then his voice slightly quivered, notwithstanding his evident efforts to dissimulate this emotion.

"Every thing all right at the pit?" asked M. Gregoire.

"H'm, I'm being knocked about a bit like all the others by this confounded crisis. Sure enough we are paying for our past prosperity. They built too many factories, constructed too many railways, sunk too much capital in their expectations of an unlimited output. As a matter of course, the money is tied up. There isn't any floating capital to keep things going Business don't look right, but I'll get over it all the same."

His history was very simple. Like his cousin he had inherited a share in the Montsou mines, but being an enterprising engineer and anxious to make a large fortune rapidly, he hastened to sell out when his share attained a million. For months he had been nursing an idea. His wife's marriage portion was the small concession of Vandame, where only two pits had been opened—the Jean-Bart and the Gaston-Marie. But they had been so neglected, their material was so defective, that they scarcely paid expenses. His idea was to repair the Jean-Bart, to renew the machinery, to enlarge the shaft so as to be able to go down deeper, only keeping the Jean-Bart for the purpose of drainage. He said it would prove a gold mine—only a coal mine in name. The idea in itself was right enough. But its realization had already swallowed his million, and this "confounded industrial crisis" broke out just when tremendous profits would have proved the truth of his theory. Besides, being a bad administrator—very kind, though rough with his workmen—he allowed himself to be robbed since the death of his wife, letting his daughters get the upper hand of him. The elder wanted to go on the stage; the younger had already had two pictures refused at the Salon. They were two good girls, jolly amidst the general rout, and giving promise of turning out very clever should bad fortune prevail.

"You see, Léon, you were wrong not to sell out when I did," said Deneulin hesitatingly. "Every thing is going down now, and you may have to wait for your dividends. If you had entrusted your money to me, you would soon have found out what we can do at Vandame, in our mine."

M. Grégoire was leisurely finishing his chocolate. He seemed rather embarrassed.

"Never," he said. "You know well enough that I do not wish to speculate. I am living very quietly; it would be silly on my part to bother my head with business. As for Montsou, it may continue to go down, there will be always sufficient for us. One must not be too greedy. Listen to me. If you don't look out you'll burn your fingers one day, for Montsou will go up again; the children of the children of Cecily will get their fine wheaten bread out of it yet."

Deneulin listened with an embarrassed smile.

"So if I told you to put a hundred thousand francs in my affair, you'd refuse?" he said very slowly.

But noticing the consternation of the Grégoires he regretted having been too quick, so he postponed his hint of a loan, reserving it as a last resource.

"Oh, it hasn't come to that yet; I was only joking. Per

haps you are right after all. The money that others earn for you is the surest to thrive upon."

Then they changed the topic. Cecily made further inquiries about her cousins, whose tastes preoccupied her, though she was shocked at them. Madame Grégoire promised to take her sweet darling to see the young ladies the moment the weather became fine. M. Grégoire, busy with his own thoughts, had taken no part in the conversation. Suddenly he said out loud :

"If I were you I'd give up the idea and treat with Montsou. They would only be too glad, and you would get your money back again."

He was alluding to the old hatred existing between the Montsou concession and that of Vandame. Notwithstanding the slight importance of the latter, its powerful neighbors were furious at its square league of ground being wedged in between their vast property. After having tried, but in vain, to kill it, as it were, the company was now scheming to buy it, when the death rattle should be in its throat. The war between the two continued without a truce; their galleries stopped at two hundred yards from each other. It was a war to the knife, though the intercourse of the directors and engineers was as polite and courteous as ever.

Denuelin's eyes flashed fire.

"Never," he exclaimed, in his turn. "While I am alive Montsou will never get Vandame. I dined on Thursday at Hennebeau's, and I saw well enough what he was driving at. And last autumn, when the big-wigs were down here—do you think I don't know what all their politeness means? Yes, yes; I know them—those dukes and counts and generals and ministers, highwaymen all, who'd strip you of your shirt at the corner of a wood." M. Grégoire did not try to stop him. He himself did not defend the Board of Montsou. Its six members, deriving their powers from the Treaty of 1760, ruled the company too despotically. At the decease of one, the right of selecting a successor devolved upon the five survivors, who chose him from among the most powerful and wealthiest shareholders. The owner of "The Piolaine," so modest in his wants, was of opinion that these gentlemen often overstepped the bounds of fairness in their exaggerated love of money.

Mélenie had come to clear the table. Outside the dogs barked again, and Honorine was going to see what it meant when mademoiselle got up herself. What with the heat of the room and the quantity of *brioche* and chocolate she had consumed, she felt uncomfortable.

"Never mind, Honorine, it's for my lesson," she said.

Deneulin had also risen from his chair. When the door closed behind the young girl, he asked with a smile :—

"Well, and what about this marriage with little Négrel?"

"Nothing is settled," replied Madame Grégoire. "It's merely an idea; we must have time to think."

"Perhaps you are right," resumed Deneulin with a significant laugh. "I believe there's something wrong there. But what puzzles me is that Madame Hennebeau should be so eager about it. She is throwing him at Cecily."

But M. Grégoire protested. Scandal, backbiting—it was nothing else. Madame Hennebeau was a lady, old enough almost to be her nephew's mother. He didn't like that sort of tittle-tattle. Deneulin, still laughing, shook hands and went away.

"No, it isn't for my lesson," said Cecily, coming back. "It's that woman with her two children, whom we met the other day: you know, mamma, the wife of the miner. Are they to come in here?"

Madame Grégoire didn't know. Were they very dirty? Not very ; and they could leave their clogs on the doorstep. The mother and father had already ensconced themselves in their easy chairs; their digestion had begun. The fear of arresting its progress by a too sudden change of air decided them.

"Tell them to come in, Honorine."

Maheu's wife and her little ones came in, frozen, hungry, and looking frightened at this nice room, where it was so warm, with the smell of the *brioche* still about it.

CHAPTER VIII.

WEALTH AND MISERY.

IN the room, the door of which had been closed; the gray daylight was gradually filtering through the latticed shutters and sparkling fanlike across the ceiling. They all continued their sleep in the heavy, musty atmosphere, Leonora and Henry lying in each other's arms, Alzira with her head resting on her deformed shoulder, while Daddy Jollycorpse, by himself in Zachariah and Johnny's bed, snored lustily, his

mouth wide open. Not a sound came from the dark hole, where Mother Maheu had fallen asleep again, with Estella still suckling and lying like a well-stuffed pillow across her body.

The clock below struck six. Almost immediately after the village awakened a second time. There was a noise of doors being opened and shut, of clogs clanking on the pavement; the sifters were going to their work. Then it became still again until seven, when shutters were thrown back, and yawns and coughs resounded through the thin walls. There was the prolonged grinding of a coffee-mill somewhere without any one in the room being disturbed by it.

But suddenly Alzira started up in bed. There was a row in the next house; she heard some one being slapped. She remembered what time it was, and ran barefooted to awaken her mother.

"Mother, mother, you'll be late for your errand. Take care, you'll smother Estella." And she took away the child, which was almost suffocated beneath the woman's weight.

"Bother it," muttered Mother Maheu, rubbing her eyes violently; "one goes to bed so tired, that one would like to sleep all day. Get Leonora's and Henry's clothes on. I'll take them with me, and you'll look after Estella. I can't drag her along, too; besides, she might catch cold in this beastly weather."

She washed herself hurriedly, slipping on an old blue skirt the best she had, and a gray woolen jacket which she had mended overnight.

"And what about the soup?" she said aloud to herself. "They must have something to eat, the brats."

While her mother went down stairs, knocking about every thing in her way, Alzira got back to the room, carrying Estella, who was screaming with all her might. But she was used to the baby's temper, and though but nine, she had tender, motherly ways of quieting the little one. She put it down gently in her own bed, still warm, and allowed it to suck her thumb until it was fast asleep. It was time, for presently there was another row, and she had to interfere between Leonora and Henry, who were just waking up. These two did not agree, did not embrace each other save when asleep. The girl, about six, the moment she opened her eyes, belabored the urchin, her junior by about two years, who meekly received the blows without retaliating. Both had the same dropsical heads, too large for their bodies, and ornamented with coarse yellow hair. Alzira had to pull her sis-

ter's legs, threatening to skin her alive if she did not leave off knocking the boy about. Both kicked and squealed while being washed and dressed. Alzira was obliged to open the shutters lest the noise should awaken Daddy Jollycorpse. But the latter continued to snore in spite of the uproar made by the children.

"Are you ready up there?" shouted Mother Maheu. She had opened the shutters, looked to the fire and put some fresh coal on. She secretly hoped that the old man had not eaten all the soup. But the pipkin was scraped clean, so she boiled a handful of vermicelli which she had kept in reserve for the last three days. They would have to eat it plainly boiled, without butter, for there was sure to remain none of the scrap of last night. Fancy, therefore, her surprise when she found that Catherine had managed to leave a lump the size of a walnut. But this time the cupboard was assuredly empty; nothing, not a crust of bread, not a morsel of anything, not a bone to gnaw. What would become of them if Maigrat remained obstinate and refused to trust them, if the folk at The Piolaine did not give her five francs? She would have to find something, though, for the men and the girl when they came back from the pit. They could not live without food.

"Are you coming down or not?" she shouted once more. "It's time I was going."

When Alzira and the two little ones did come down, she divided the vermicelli on three small plates. She wasn't hungry, she said. But though Catherine had already poured water on the old coffee grounds once, she did so a third time, and swallowed two mugsful of the brew. It looked much more like water from a rusty tank than like coffee. Never mind, it would keep life in her, at any rate. "Listen," she said to Alzira; "don't wake your grandfather, and take care of Estella. If she wakes up and squeals too much, take this lump of sugar, put some water on it, and give her a few spoonfuls of it. I know that you are a good girl and that you won't eat it yourself."

"And how about going to school, mother?"

"School must wait for another day. I can't spare you."

"And the soup! Shall I put it on if you are late?"

"The soup! the soup! No; you'd better wait till I come back."

Alzira, with the precociousness of the confirmed cripple, knew very well how to make the soup. But she understood and did not insist. The whole of the village was awake by

now, the children went by in groups on their way to school, clanking their clogs along the pavement as they went. It had just struck eight, the sound of voices gossiping to the left, at Levaque's, rose higher and higher. The women were beginning their day's work, sipping their morning's coffee, their arms akimbo, their tongues going twenty to the dozen. Some sloven, with coarse lips, her flat nose still further flattened by the pressure against the window, cried out, "Just come and listen to this."

"Not now," answered Mother Maheu; "by and by, when I've been on my errand."

And lest she should be tempted from her resolve by the offer of a glass of hot coffee, she crammed the food down the little one's throats and started with them. Up stairs Daddy Jolly-corpse continued to snore with a rhythmical noise that sounded throughout the house like a lullaby.

To Mother Maheu's surprise the wind had abated outside. There was a chill thaw and a leaden sky; the walls were dripping with a sticky moisture, the roads heavy with mud, a mud peculiar to this country of coal; black, like soot ground with grease, in which the clogs stuck fast. She felt obliged to slap Leonora, because the little one kept kicking up the paste with the tips of her clogs, as if she had been using a shovel. On leaving the village, she had skirted the mounds of shale and taken the road by the canal, making short cuts through the waste grounds, shut off by rotten wooden fences. Shed succeeded to shed, interrupted now and then by long factory buildings with towering chimneys; it was the country converted into a manufacturing outskirt. Behind a small plantation of poplars, the old Requillart pit showed the crazy top of its shaft, of which scarcely any thing remained but its huge framework. Taking to the right, Mother Maheu found herself in the high road.

"Wait till I get at you, you dirty pig. I'll teach you to make mud pies."

This to Henry, who was amusing himself kneading a handful of mud. The two little ones, slapped without distinction, became quiet, only squinting as they went along to look at the footprints of their clogs in the mud. They waded rather than walked, tired as they already were with having to lift their feet out of the slush at every step.

Towards Marchiennes the road stretched its two leagues of pavement, lying straight like a ribbon dipped in dirty wheel-grease, across the reddish soil. But on the other side it descended zig-zag across Montsou, built on the slope of the

swelling uplands. Those northern roads, drawn like a towing line between the manufacturing towns, deviating but slightly, having scarcely any gradients, were made bit by bit, and intended only to make one industrial beehive of the whole country. The small brick cottages, some painted yellow, others blue, a third lot black—the latter no doubt to arrive the quicker at the final hue—descended in a serpentine line to the right and to the left as far as the bottom slope. Some two-storied buildings, belonging to the various factory managers, pierced, as it were, the serried lines of narrow frontages.

The church, equally built in brick, bore a strong likeness to a new model smelting furnace, with its square clock-tower already begrimed with the coal dust floating in the air. And among the sugar bakeries, the rope walks, and the flour mills, the public dancing-rooms, the beer-shops, and cheap eating-houses were so numerous, that out of a thousand dwellings they occupied more than half.

As she was nearing the yards of the company, a vast series of warehouses and workshops, Mother Maheu took her little ones by the hand. A little further down stood the house of the director, an overgrown Swiss châlet, divided from the high road by an iron gate and fronted by a garden in which a few lank trees seemed to be keeping guard regretfully. A carriage had just drawn up to the door; a gentleman decorated with the legion of honor, and a lady in a fur cloak, alighted from it. They were, no doubt, some visitors from Paris, driven over from the Marchiennes station, for Madame Hennebeau who appeared in the semi-daylight of the hall, uttered an exclamation of surprise and joy.

"Get along, then," growled Mother Maheu to the little ones dragging them out of the mud in which they were floundering.

When she reached Maigrat's she was very excited. Maigrat's was next door to the director's; only a wall divided the mansion from the shop, a long building, whose windowless front directly faced the road. He sold every thing, grocery, salted provisions, fruit and vegetables, bread, beer, and tin goods. Formerly inspector at the Voreux pit, he had started in business with a small canteen; thanks to the protection of his chiefs he had gradually enlarged his store. Driving all the petty hucksters' shop from the field. He bought wholesale, the custom of the miners' villages combined enabled him to sell cheaper and to give credit on a larger scale. Besides, he had remained friends with and the dependent of the company who had built his store and the small cottage attached to it.

"Here I am again, Monsieur Maigrat," said Mother Maheu.

He was standing at his door and glanced at her without saying a word. He was stout, self-composed, and polite, and he prided himself upon never changing his mind.

"Look here, you won't have the heart to send me away again like yesterday. We must have bread to eat till Monday. Sure enough we have been owing you sixty francs these last two years, but—"

She tried to explain in short jerky phrases. It was an old score, run up during a strike. Twenty times or more they had promised to settle it, but do what they would they could not manage it; they did not lessen it by two francs a fortnight. Added to this she had had another misfortune; the shoemaker to whom she owed twenty francs threatened to put the brokers in if she did not pay. That was the reason of their being without a penny. But for this they would have held out until Saturday like all the others.

But without opening his lips, Maigrat, his stomach well forward, his arms crossed upon his chest, refused with a motion of his head at each fresh supplication.

"Only two loaves, Monsieur Maigrat; I am reasonable enough, I do not ask for coffee. Only two three-pound loaves a day."

"No," he exclaimed at last with all his might.

His wife appeared upon the scene; a sickly creature, bending the whole day over a ledger, without daring to lift her eyes from it. But she turned away almost immediately, frightened at seeing the poor wretch appeal to her in mute prayer. The strangest stories were current about Maigrat and his spouse; the slavish terror of the latter, her reluctant complicity in the debauches of the former. They were more than mere rumors. It was said that to soften Maigrat's heart it required not a skillful ambassador, but a complacent ambassadress.

Mother Maheu, who kept supplicating Maigrat, began to feel ill at ease at the persistent look of the small ferret-like eyes that took her in from top to toe. She began to get angry, and suddenly turned away, violently dragging after her Leonora and Henry, who had beguiled the time with picking up the empty nut-shells littering the doorway, in the hope of finding a stray kernel in them. "It won't bring you luck, Monsieur Maigrat; mark my words," she said, as a parting shot.

Her last chance lay with the gentlefolk at The Piolaine. If

they did not fork out a five-franc piece they might all lie down and die. She had turned to the left and taken the road to Joiselle. At a bend of the road where the head office of the company, a real palace in brick, where the swells from Paris and princes and Government personages came to eat grand dinners every autumn. And while trudging along she was already laying out the hoped-for five francs; first of all bread, then coffee, after that a quarter of butter and potatoes for the soup of the morning and the hash of the evening; it might run, perhaps, to a little bit of brawn for the men, for they wanted some meat.

The curé of Montsou, the Abbé Joire, was coming along, holding up his gown, and gingerly picking his way among the dry spots, like a well-fed cat that fears the wet. He was very soft spoken, lived at peace with every body, endeavoring to meddle with no one.

"Good morning, Monsieur le Curé."

He did not stop, but smiled to the children and left her standing in the middle of the road. Mother Maheu had not the faintest sense of religion, but she had suddenly been struck with the idea that this priest was going to give her something.

And she continued her journey through the black sticky mud. They had still near upon two miles to go; the little ones finding no amusement, had to be dragged along. On both sides of the road were the same plots of waste ground, inclosed by the same moldy wooden palings, the same factory buildings, smoke-begrimed, the same tall chimneys. Then in the open country a succession of flat level fields, like an ocean of brown patches, unrelieved by a tree as far as the violet horizon of the Vandame Woods.

"Carry me, mother."

She carried them in turns. Large puddles riddled the road; she tucked up her skirts, lest she should be too dirty on reaching The Piolaine. Twice or thrice she almost lost her footing, the pavement was so greasy. And when they came at last within sight of the door-step three enormous dogs flew at them, barking so violently that the little ones yelled with fright. The coachman had to lay about him with his whip.

"Leave your clogs, and come in," repeated Honorine.

In the dining-room the mother and the little ones remained motionless, feeling faint with the sudden heat, embarrassed by the looks of this old gentleman and lady, lazily reclining in their easy chairs.

"My dear, perform your little office," said the latter.

The Grégoires had charged Cecily with their alms-giving. According to them it formed part of a genteel education. Charity was an imperative duty: they themselves said that their house was the abode of charity. They furthermore prided themselves upon their discernment, so haunted were they by the fear of being imposed upon and encouraging vice. Consequently, they never gave any money, not so much as half a franc, not even two sous, for it was a well-known fact that the moment the poor had two sous they went in drink. Their charity, therefore, was in kind, above all, in warm clothing, given to the indigent children during the winter.

"The poor dears," exclaimed Cecily, "they are pale with the cold. Honorine, go and fetch the parcel from up stairs."

The servants also looked at the wretched trio with the degree of pity and concern of the domestic whom the prospect of meal times inspires with no uneasiness. While the housemaid went up stairs, the cook, lost in contemplation, had put back the remainder of the *brioche* on the table to leave her arms dangling idly by her sides.

"I have just two nice little woolen dresses and scarves," continued the young lady; "you'll see they'll keep them beautifully warm."

Mother Maheu recovered her speech at last. "Thank you very much, mademoiselle," she stammered. "You are all very kind."

Tears had started to her eyes; she made sure of her five francs; she was only debating with herself as to the manner of asking for them, in case they did not offer them. The housemaid was a long while coming back; there was a moment of awkward silence. To the right and left, hanging on to and half hidden by their mother's skirts, the little ones were staring with wondering eyes at the *brioche* on the table.

"You have only these two?" asked Madame Grégoire, feeling the silence becoming irksome.

"Oh, madam, I have seven."

M. Grégoire, who had taken up his paper, sat upright in his chair.

"Seven!" he exclaimed, in a tone of indignation; "seven! how is that, in the name of all that's good?"

"Very improvident," purred the old lady.

The woman tried to explain in a lame, unsatisfactory way. And, besides, when they grew up, they brought money in. They would have been right enough at home, if they had not had the grandfather, who was becoming stiff and unfit for work, and if the others, besides the two lads and the girl, were

old enough to go down. The little ones must have food, though they couldn't work.

"I suppose you have worked a long while at the mine?" said Madame Grégoire.

A silent smile lighted up Mother Maheu's sallow face.

"A long while, indeed, madame, as you say. I myself went down until I was twenty. But after my second child the doctor said I had to give it up, because, it appears, the work shook my bones too much. Besides, I got married then, and had enough to do to look after the home. But on my husband's side they have been there ever so long—from father to son—for ever so long. I don't know exactly how long, but ever since they gave the first stroke of the pick yonder at the Requillart pit."

M. Grégoire put down his paper once more and looked at the woe-begone woman and children, with their waxen-colored flesh, their colorless hair, their visible degeneration, eaten up with anemia, slow starvation written in every line of their sad, plain features. There was another pause, during which nothing was heard but the burning coal hissing forth its gas. The atmosphere was overheated, producing a drowsy sensation.

"But what are they doing?" said Cecily, impatiently. "Mélenie, go up and tell her that the parcel is at the bottom of the cupboard to the left."

Meanwhile M. Grégoire finished aloud the reflection with which the sight of the woman had inspired him.

"True enough, some people have a deal of trouble in this world; but, my good woman, one can't help saying that a good many of our workmen are not as they ought to be. Instead of putting money by like the peasants, the miners drink, get into debt, and end by having nothing wherewith to feed their children."

"Monsieur is right," answered Mother Maheu, quietly. "They are not always what they should be. That's what I often tell some of the ne'er-do-wells when they grumble. I've been lucky enough; my husband does not drink. Still now and then he does take a drop too much, but there it stops. It's the more credit to him, because before his marriage he used to drink like a very pig, saving your presence. But we don't seem to be any better off for it. There are times, like to-day, when you might turn the house upside down for a brass farthing."

She was working up to the five-franc piece and continued in a whining voice explaining the fatal debt, small at first, but at last getting the upper hand of them. Something had been

paid off regularly for many fortnights. But one day they were behind, and then it was all over; they could not get square again. They were getting deeper and deeper into the hole, the men became disgusted with the work which did not even allow of their debts being paid.

Work might go hang. They were up to their eyes in the mess. It was easily explained. The men wanted a mug of beer to wash down the dust. That's how it began; it ended by their sticking in the beershop morning, noon, and night, when they were in trouble. Without wishing to lay the blame upon any one in particular, it might be, after all, that the workmen didn't earn enough.

"I thought," said Madame Grégoire, "that the company allowed you firing and rent."

Mother Maheu cast a sidelong glance at the glowing coal in the fireplace.

"That's right enough; they give us coal of a kind; still it burns. As for the rent it's only six francs a month; it looks nothing, but sometimes it's very hard to pay for all that. If they were to cut me into pieces to-day they wouldn't find two sous. Nay, not one, not one."

The lady and gentleman kept silent, comfortably lying back in their easy chairs, but gradually getting worried at the display of all this misery. The woman felt afraid she had offended them so she added, in a calm, sensible voice, "I don't say all this for the sake of complaining. Things are as they are, and we must make the best of them; besides what else could we do? we can't change them. The best, after all, is to try and do one's duty honestly in the walk of life God has placed us in; isn't it so, monsieur and madame?"

M. Grégoire nodded his head very approvingly. "With such principles, my good woman, one is above bad fortune," he said.

Honorine and Mélenie had brought the parcel. It was Cecily who undid and took the two woolen dresses from it. She added scarves and even stockings and mittens to them. All this would be very nice. She was hurrying over the business now, and made the servants wrap up the things, because her pianoforte mistress had come, and she gently edged the mother and her little ones towards the door.

"We are so hard up," stammered the woman; "if we only had a five-franc piece."

The words stuck in her throat, for the Maheus were proud and did not ask for charity. Cecily, very confused, looked at her father, but the latter refused peremptorily with an air of offended duty.

"No, we have set our face against it, we couldn't do it."

Then the young girl, moved at the disappointed look of the mother, wanted to make up for it with the children, who were still keeping their eyes fixed on the *brioche*. She cut two large slices and gave them to them. "There, that's for you," she said. Then, suddenly bethinking herself, she took the cake back again, and asked for an old newspaper. "Wait a bit, you must share with your brothers and sisters."

And with her parents looking on admiringly, she continued to push them to the door. The poor little ones, who wanted for bread, went away holding the *brioche* reverently in their small, cold-benumbed hands.

Mother Maheu dragged her children along the pavement. She no longer saw the waste fields, the black mud, the leaden sky above her. When reaching Montsou she resolutely entered Maigrat's shop and pleaded so eloquently that she ended by bringing away two loaves, various other provisions, and even the wished-for five-franc piece. For Maigrat also lent money, to be paid in weekly instalments. By this time she knew what he meant. He had inquired after Catherine, and told the mother not to trouble herself to come so far, but to send her daughter.

CHAPTER IX.

VILLAGE GOSSIP.

IT struck eleven o'clock on the small church of the village of the "Two Hundred and Forty," a brick building, where the Abbé Joire came to say mass on Sundays. Next door, at the school, equally built of brick, the droning voices of the children could be heard, notwithstanding that the windows were hermetically closed against the cold. The large roads, divided into garden plots, back to back, remained deserted between the four long rows of uniform cottages. The gardens themselves exhibited a melancholy, wintry aspect, with their soil half dug up, and their scant remainders of vegetables. From one end of the pavement to the other the water-pipes kept up a continual dripping into the water-butts, though it did not rain, but the lowering sky was laden with moisture. And this village, rising abruptly on this vast table

land, bordered by black roads as with an edge of crape, had nothing gay about it save its regular lines of red tiles, constantly washed clean by the falling showers.

When Mother Maheu got to the village she went out of her way in order to buy some potatoes of the wife of an inspector who had some left of her own crop. Behind a belt of lank, lean poplars, the only trees to be found in these parts, rose an isolated group of houses, built four by four, and standing in their own gardens. The company having reserved this new experiment in building as dwellings for the viewers, the miners had given it the name of "Silk Stockings," in the same way that, with an irony born of their wretchedness, they called their own village "Pay-thy-Debts."

"At last," said the mother, bending beneath her parcels, and pushing Henry and Leonora, coated with mud, their little legs refusing their service, into her own doorway.

Before the fire, Estella was squealing with all her might, though Alzira was dandling her in her arms. Having no more sugar to give her, and not knowing how to quiet the baby, the little girl had pretended to give her the breast, a subterfuge which still more enraged the infant.

"Give her to me," exclaimed the mother the moment she had put down her parcels. "She won't allow us to hear our own words."

With one long sob the baby subsided, and they could consult together. The little girl had managed very well. She had swept and tidied the room and kept up a bright fire. And in the intervals of their conversation there came from up stairs the rhythmical snoring of the grandfather, which had not ceased for a moment.

"To be sure, what a lot of things," said Alzira, smiling at the provisions. "If you like, mother, I'll put the soup on."

The table was littered—a parcel of clothes, two loaves, potatoes, butter, coffee, and chicory, and half a pound of pig's brawn.

"Yes, the soup," said the mother, with a fatigued air; "you must go and cut the sorrel and pull up some leeks. No, you'll get some by and by for the men. But first put the potatoes on the fire, we'll have them with a lump of butter. And here's some coffee; don't forget the coffee."

But suddenly she remembered the *brioche*. She looked at Henry and Leonora, who, already recovered from their fatigue, were sprawling on the floor, kicking each other playfully. Their hands were perfectly empty. The greedy little pigs had surreptitiously eaten the whole of the cake on the

way. They were slapped accordingly, while Alzira, putting the saucepan on the fire, tried to pacify her mother.

"Never mind, mother; if it was for me, you know I don't care for cake. They were hungry, trudging about like that."

It struck twelve, and the clogs of the school children were heard on the pavement outside. The potatoes were cooked, the coffee, thickened with at least half its weight of chicory, was passed through the strainer to the sound of its own drip, drip. A corner of the table was cleared, but the mother sat down all by herself; the children took their plates on their laps, the little boy all the while greedily eying the pig's brawn, the greasy paper of which excited his appetite.

Mother Maheu was sipping her coffee leisurely, holding her glass in both hands to enjoy its heat, when Daddy Jollycorpse came down. As a rule, he got up much later, and his breakfast awaited him on the hob. But to-day he began to grumble because there was no soup. But when his daughter-in-law told him that people did as they could, and not as they would, he ate his potatoes in silence. From time to time he got up to spit in the fire, for cleanliness sake. And, huddled in his chair, having no teeth wherewith to chew, he kept mashing his food, his head on his breast, his dim eyes staring vacantly before him.

"Oh, I forgot, mother," said Alzira, "neighbor Levaque came in."

Her mother interrupted her. "I'm sick of La Levaque." Mother Maheu had a grudge against her neighbor, who had pleaded poverty the night before in order not to lend her anything. She happened to know, however, that La Levaque was by no means so hard up as she pretended to be, her lodger Bouteloup having paid his fortnight in advance. But in the miners' village neither borrowed of nor lent to each other.

"You just put me in mind," resumed Mother Maheu; "measure me out a mill full of coffee beans and put them in a piece of paper, I'll take them to La Pierronne, who lent me some the day before yesterday."

And when the little girl had tied up the small parcel, the mother added that she would be back in a minute to put the soup for the men on the fire, after which she went out with Estella in her arms, leaving the old man to pound his potatoes between his toothless gums, while Henry and Leonora were quarreling with each other for the skins that had dropped on the floor.

Instead of going round, Mother Maheu cut straight across the gardens, lest La Levaque should call her in. Her plot of

ground was at the back of Pierron's, and there was a gap in the moldy paling through which they chatted. The common water-butt, supplying four families, was there. At the side, behind a tuft of drooping lilac, stood an out-house, a kind of shed used for storing old iron and tools, and serving as a kind of hutch for the rabbits which graced their tables on high days and holidays. It had just struck one, the hour at which the village took its coffee. Not a soul was to be seen either at the doors or windows. A solitary quarryman, waiting for his shift to go on, was digging in his garden: he did not even raise his head. But when Mother Maheu got opposite the other block of buildings, she was surprised to see coming round by the corner of the church a gentleman and two ladies. She stopped a second and recognized them; it was Madame Hennebeau showing the village to her two visitors, the decorated gentleman and the lady in the fur cloak.

"Why did you trouble yourself," said La Pierronne, when Mother Maheu handed her the coffee; "there was no hurry."

La Pierronne was about eight-and-twenty, and admitted to be the handsome woman of the village. Dark, with intelligent features, a low forehead, large eyes, a small mouth, and very coquettish withal, scrupulously neat and clean with the cleanliness of a pet white kitten, her figure had kept its rounded outlines, for she had no children. Her mother, La Brulée, the widow of a miner who had lost his life below, after having sent her girl to a factory, swearing that she should not marry a pitman, never left off nagging when her daughter married Pierron, a widower, with a girl of eight by his first wife. The couple lived very happily, notwithstanding the gossip of the neighbors affecting the woman as well as her husband. They did not owe a farthing, they had meat twice a week, the house was like a band-box, the stewpans shone like looking-glasses. By a greater stroke of luck still, and thanks to certain influence, the company had given her permission to sell lollypops and biscuits, the glass bottles filled with which stood on shelves behind the window. It was six or seven sous gain per day, some Sundays as much as twelve. And amidst this comfort there was only La Brulée bellowing incessantly like the old revolutionary hag she was, and little Lydia, who suffered in kicks for the hasty temper of the rest of the family.

"How she's getting on," said La Pierronne, patting Estella's podgy cheeks.

"Don't talk to me about them; they are a trouble and no mistake," said Mother Maheu. "You may think yourself

lucky not to have any. You can keep things tidy, at any rate."

Though the Maheus' home was tidy enough, though she scrubbed the house from top to bottom every Saturday, the woman glanced somewhat enviously at this neat room, in which there were even ornaments, gilt vases on the sideboard, a looking-glass, and three engravings in frames.

La Pierronne was taking her coffee by herself, her people being all at the mine at this hour of the day.

"You'll have a glass of coffee with me?" she said.

"No, thank you," answered Mother Maheu. "I've just had mine."

"Never mind; have some more."

And Mother Maheu did not mind. Both, seated opposite each other, sipped leisurely. Between the bottles of sweets and biscuits their looks had wandered to the houses over the way, the degree of whiteness of whose blinds was a test of the cleanliness of the housewives. Those at Levaque's were very dirty—downright rags, that seemed to have been promoted to their present use after a probationary stage as dishcloths.

"I don't understand how people can live in such filth," said La Pierronne in her soft way.

That was enough for Mother Maheu. She had been set going, and she did not stop. If she had only had the luck to get a lodger like Bouteloup she would have managed her house differently to that. If people knew how to manage, a lodger was a capital thing. But he should remain a lodger. But what could one expect from a household where the husband struck his wife and went gadding about after music hall singers?

La Pierronne put on an air of profound disgust. Those music hall singers; such sluts! What surprises me most is that you allow your son to keep company with their girl," she added, alluding again to the Levaques.

"How could I hinder it? Their garden is against ours. They were always together. You couldn't put your face outside without stumbling against them." And then she began to inveigh against the immorality of the place in general, winding up her little speech with "After all, it doesn't matter; all those couples generally get married in the end. The worst of it is that they get married too soon, because the moment they do the parents may shift for themselves."

La Pierronne thought that, all things considered, these two, meaning Zachariah and Philomena, had better get married as soon as possible. "It must come to that one day," she added, "and Zachariah's money is lost to you anyhow."

Mother Maheu, beside herself with anger, clenched her fists. "My curses on their heads if they do," she yelled. "What! Is this all the respect Zachariah owes us. Let him pay back all he has cost us before taking a wife to himself. What would become of us if the young ones began to work for others directly they can work? We might just as well lie down and die."

But by and by she grew more composed. "Of course I speak in general," she added in another moment. "We'll see later on. Your coffee is very strong; you put in what's necessary."

And after a quarter of an hour's further gossip, she suddenly got up, saying that the men's soup was not put on. Outside, the children were going back to school, a few women stood lolling at their doors watching Madame Hennebeau who was walking along one of the rows, explaining things to her guests. The visit began to interest the village. The quarrymen left off digging for a moment; two hens scampered about the gardens, frightened out of their lives.

Just as Mother Maheu was going back to her own cottage she ran full tilt against La Levavue, who had rushed out to intercept M. Vanderhagen, the company's doctor, a short, thick-set individual, overwhelmed with business, who prescribed for his patients on the run.

"Monsieur, I don't get a night's rest; I've got pains every where. I wish you'd tell me what to do."

He addressed them all in the familiar "thou." "Don't pester me; thou drinkest too much coffee," he said.

"And my husband?" asked Mother Maheu in her turn. "You ought to come and see him. He always complains of pains in his legs."

A coarse jest, terminating with the same "Don't pester me," was all the answer she got.

The two women remained in the middle of the road looking at the back of the retreating doctor.

"Come in for a minute," said La Levaque after having exchanged a discouraging shrug of the shoulder with her neighbor. "You know the news, don't you? You'll take a drop of coffee, it's just fresh made?"

Mother Maheu struggled in vain against this new temptation. Well, she'd go and have another sip, just to show that she bore no ill-will. And she went in.

The living-room was black—absolutely filthy, its floor and walls stained with grease, the table and sideboard sticky with dirt, an indescribable smell pervading the whole,

Near the fire, his elbows on the table, his nose in his plate, Bouteloup, looking young for his thirty-three years, was finishing a remainder of boiled meat. He was devouring placidly, with Achilles, Philomena's first-born, standing at his knees. The child was about two years old, and waited for the scraps with the earnest, mute supplication of a greedy animal. The lodger, with his long brown beard, but tender-hearted enough, from time to time stuffed a piece of meat down the little one's mouth.

"Wait till I sweeten it," said La Levaque, putting the brown sugar beforehand in the coffee-pot.

She, by six years her lodger's senior, looked horrid with her triple chin dropping on her chest, with her chest dropping on her stomach, with her hideous, animalish face covered with stubbly tufts of gray hair. But Bouteloup was not particular as to the looks of his landlady any more than to the taste of his food or the cleanliness of his bed-linen, which was changed about once in six weeks. The principal thing to Levaque himself was that Bouteloup paid, for he loved to repeat that short reckonings made long friends.

"Look here," said La Levaque, the moment they sat down, "what I wanted to tell you is this: La Pierronne was seen last night loitering near 'Silk Stockings;' the gentleman you know of met her behind Rasseneur's, and the two strolled away together along the canal. Nice doings for a married woman, ain't they?"

Mother Maheu came out with a bit of wit, at which Bouteloup burst out laughing, while little Achilles received, as his share of the hilarity all round, a crust of bread dipped in the soup. The two women continued their stories about La Pierronne, a downright coquette, not better looking than any one else, but always tittivating and washing and scenting herself. They only stopped their cackle when a neighbor brought in Desirée, Philomena's last born, a baby of nine months. The girl-mother taking her breakfast in the sifting-shed, had arranged for her child to be brought thither to give it the breast while squatting on her haunches in the coal dust.

"I can't leave mine for a minute, or she sets up squealing directly," said Mother Maheu, looking at Estella, who had fallen asleep in her arms. But she did not succeed avoiding the explanation which for the last few moments she had read in La Levaque's eyes.

"I say I think it's high time that there should be an end to all this."

At the outset the two mothers, without wasting many

words, had agreed not to hurry the marriage of their son and daughter. If Zachariah's mother wished to keep as long as possible the fortnightly pay of her lad, the mother of Philomena did not relish the idea of giving up the wages of her lass. There was no need to hurry things. La Levaque even preferred to keep the child while there was only one, but since the latter was growing up and wanted bread like the rest, and a second had come besides, she thought she was playing a losing game. Hence her anxiety for the marriage. Like a practical woman she did not wish to pay out of her own pocket.

"Zachariah has drawn for the conscription," she resumed, "so nothing stands in the way. When shall it be; say?"

"Wait at least till the weather gets fine," replied Mother Maheu rather embarrassed. "I'll not stand in the way. Bother them both, why couldn't they——" She did not continue the sentence but the sequel came in spite of herself. "Honor bright, I'd strangle Catherine if I found out she'd done wrong."

La Levaque simply shrugged her shoulders. Bouteloup, like a man who feels perfectly at home, had gone to the cupboard for the loaf of bread. Some vegetables for Levaque's soup, potatoes and leeks, were lying on a corner of the table half peeled, having been taken up and put down again a dozen times, amidst the incessant gossip. La Levaque had taken them up again now, when she left off anew, to plant herself right in front of the window.

"What's all this? Oh, it's Madame Hennebeau with some swells. They're going to La Pierronne's." And all at once both fell foul of La Pierronne again. Whenever the company showed the village to visitors they never missed taking them straight to La Pierronne's, because, forsooth, it was clean. But the visitors weren't treated to the stories about her and the head viewer. It was easy enough to be clean and tidy under the circumstances. And so on, as long as the visitors remained in the cottage opposite.

"There they go," said La Levaque at last. "They're making the tour, my dear. I'd bet they're going to your place."

Mother Maheu got frightened. If Alzira had only wiped the table! And her soup, the soup of her men, which was not ready. And with a hasty "Good-by," she rushed away, making straight for her door without looking to the right or left.

But every thing looked bright and clean. Alzira, very serious, with a cloth wrapped round her, had set about making

the soup, seeing that her mother did not come back. She had pulled up the last leeks in the garden, cut the sorrel, and was busy picking the latter, while in a caldron on the fire the water was being heated for the men's bath when they came in. As luck would have it, Henry and Leonora were quiet, being occupied in tearing up an old almanac. Daddy Jollycorpse was smoking his pipe in silence.

Mother Maheu had scarcely recovered her breath when Madame Hennebeau, after having knocked, opened the door.

"You'll allow us, won't you, my good woman?" Tall, fair, a little heavy perhaps in the splendid maturity of her forty years, she smiled with an effort at making herself pleasant, without showing too plainly her fear of spoiling her sage-green silk dress and velvet mantle.

"Come in, come in," she kept saying to her visitors. "We are not troubling any body. Well, what say you to cleanliness like that? And this good woman has seven children. All our households are like this. I think I explained to you that the company lets them have their cottages at six francs a month. A large room on the ground floor, two rooms up stairs, a cellar and a garden."

The gentleman with the decoration, and the lady with the fur cloak, fresh from Paris that morning, opened their eyes very wide with vague surprise at things utterly unfamiliar to them.

"And a garden," repeated the lady. "But it's delightful. One would live here one's self."

"We give them coal, more than they want," continued Madame Hennebeau. "A doctor attends to them twice a week, and when they are old they get a pension, though nothing is deducted from their wages."

"A Paradise, a real land of Cockayne," whispered the gentleman, delighted.

Mother Maheu had come forward to offer chairs. The ladies declined. Madame Hennebeau was getting tired. She was glad enough to forget for a moment the ennui of her exile by playing the wild beast showman, but she almost invariably turned faint at the sight and the smell of misery, notwithstanding the well known cleanliness of the cottages which she selected for exhibition. She only repeated bits of phrases she had heard, without ever taking the slightest interest in this needy and suffering population of workers around her.

"Oh, the pretty dears," minced the lady, who thought the children hideous, with their overgrown heads and their shocks of yellow hair.

And Mother Maheu had to tell their age. Questions were also asked about Estella out of politeness. Daddy Jollycorpse had respectfully put his pipe away; he was, nevertheless, a cause of embarrassment, looking so thoroughly broken down by his forty years of life down the mine, his legs stiff with rheumatism, his shattered body, his livid wrinkled face. Being taken with a violent fit of coughing, he preferred getting up to expectorate outside, under the impression that his black saliva might be unpleasant to the gentlefolks.

To Alzira fell the greatest success. What a nice little housewife, with her cloth wrapped round her!

The mother was complimented upon having a nice little girl, already so sharp for her age. And no one alluded to her deformity, but pitying, awkward glances ever and anon reverted to the poor tiny invalid.

"And now," continued Madame Hennebeau, "if they speak of our mining villages in Paris, you'll know what to answer. No more noise than this at any time, a patriarchal way of living, every body happy and in good health, as you see for yourselves; in short, a spot where you might come and recruit a bit on account of its peace and pure air."

"Marvelous, marvelous!" exclaimed the gentleman, in a final burst of enthusiasm.

They went out with the relieved manner of people leaving a show-booth. Mother Maheu, who showed them out, remained on her threshold watching them as they walked away leisurely, talking very loud. Every body by this time was out in the streets; they had to pass through groups of women, attracted by the news of their visit, which had spread from house to house.

Just before her own door La Levaque had managed to intercept La Pierronne, who came out from sheer curiosity. Both affected to be disagreeably surprised. Were they going to stay all night at the Maheus? It wasn't so very lively there, after all, was it?

"They never have a penny to bless themselves with, with all their earnings. One wouldn't like to say where the money went to."

"I've just heard that she went this morning to the folk at The Piolaine, and that Maigrat, who wouldn't trust them any more, has let them have some things after all. We know what that means."

"Yes, yes," nodded La Pierronne, making an allusion to Catherine.

"Catherine, indeed," said La Levaque. "Didn't Mother

Maheu have the cheek to tell me just now that she'd strangle the girl if she did wrong? She'd better ask tall Chaval to get the rope for her."

"Hush!" said La Pierronne; "here they come."

Whereupon the two women, looking very demure, and without appearing too inquisitive, contented themselves with watching from the corners of their eyes the visitors, who were strolling away. After which, they made a sign to Mother Maheu, who still had Estella in her arms, to join them. And all three, standing stock still, carefully took in the well-dressed figures of the strangers. The latter had scarcely proceeded half a dozen yards when the cackling was resumed with renewed vigor.

"That means money what they've got on; more money than they themselves would fetch, perchance."

"Sure enough. I don't know the other one, but I wouldn't give you twopence for the one that belongs here, stout and good looking though she be. Nice stories they tell about her."

And when they had finished repeating said stories there was not a shred of Madame Hennebeau's character or conjugal honor left.

"Only look at her!" said La Levaque. "I don't hold with folk putting on airs of disgust, and being always dissatisfied with every thing about them. Look at her swagger; one would think that we weren't fit to wipe the dust from her shoes."

The visitors were strolling along, talking among themselves, when a carriage stopped before the church. A gentleman in a tightly-buttoned frock-coat, with a quiet air of authority about him, alighted from it.

"The husband," whispered La Levaque, suddenly lowering her voice, as if he could have heard her. She was simply yielding to the fear with which the director inspired his ten thousand workmen. It did not prevent her, however, from bandying some coarse jokes in connection with M. Hennebeau and his wife.

By this time the whole of the village was in the street. The excitement of the women increased, their groups drew closer together and became at last a crowd, while the ill-kept children sprawled along the pavements, their mouths wide open. The pale head of the schoolmaster appeared for a moment above the blind of the school-room. The quarryman left off digging his garden, and stood staring, open mouthed, one foot reposing on his spade. And the cackling rose higher

and higher like the noise of a child's rattle, like the sound of a gust of wind through the falling autumn leaves.

The crowd was at its thickest in front of Levaque's door. Two women had joined the original group, then ten, then twenty. La Pierronne prudently held her tongue now that there were too many listeners. Mother Maheu kept also silent. When M. Hennebeau opened the door and put the ladies inside the carriage, that drove off in the direction of Marchiennes, there was a final explosion of cackling voices, accompanied by gesticulations; the women drew still closer together and bawled in each other's faces like an anthill in revolt.

But it had struck three o'clock. The quarrymen were gone, with Daddy Jollycorpse, Bouteloup, and the others. Suddenly from behind the church appeared the first miners coming back from the pit, their faces begrimed, their clothes wringing wet, their arms across their breasts, their shoulders up to their ears. Then there was a general stampede among the women; they all rushed away, making for their own doors, like the slatterns most of them were, who had been coffee bibbing and tittle-tattling too long. Only one cry, big with the apprehension of coming quarrels was heard. "Oh my; and what about my soup?" and "my soup that isn't ready!"

CHAPTER X.

A MINER'S HOUSEHOLD.

WHEN Maheu came in, after leaving Stephen at Rasseneur's, he found Catherine, Zachariah, and Johnny just finishing their soup. On coming back from the pit they were so hungry that they sat down in their wet clothes without washing themselves. They did not wait for each other, so the table remained spread from morn till night, there being always some one there, swallowing his part of the food, according as the work fell out.

From the very threshold Maheu noticed the provisions. He said nothing, but his uneasy face cleared up. During the whole of the morning the emptiness of the sideboard, the home without coffee or butter, had worried him; the thought of it had obtruded itself every now and then while he was wielding

his pick and lying half choked in front of his cutting. How would the wife manage? What would become of them, if she came back empty-handed? And behold, there was something of every thing. She would tell him all about it by and by. Meanwhile he smiled and uttered a sigh of relief.

Catherine and Johnny had already got up, and were taking their coffee standing, while Zachariah, who felt still hungry after his soup, cut himself a large slice of bread, which he spread with butter. He noticed well enough the pig's brawn, which Alzira was putting on a plate, but he did not touch it, knowing that the meat was for the father, though there might be none for any one else. All had washed down their soup by a big draught of fresh water, the drink that prevailed at the fag-end of each fortnight.

"There's no beer," said the mother, when the father had seated himself in his turn. "I wanted to keep a little money by me. But if you want some the little one can run and fetch a pint."

He stared at her, surprised. What, she had money also?

"No, no," he said; "I've just had a mug full; I'll do well enough as it is." And plying his spoon slowly, he set to eating his mess of bread, potatoes, leek, and sorrel, baked brown in the basin that served him as a plate. His wife, without putting down Estella, looked, together with Alzira, to his wants: for she handed him the butter and the pig's brawn, and put back the coffee on the fire, so that it might keep hot.

Meanwhile, by the sideboard the process of washing had commenced in a barrel, the top of which had been cut off, in order to convert it into a tub. Catherine, whose turn came first, had filled it with luke-warm water. She undressed to the waist, as she had been accustomed to do ever since she was eight, without seeing any harm in it. She only turned her face to the wall, her back to the fire, and rubbed herself thoroughly with soft soap. No one paid any attention. When she was clean she went up stairs, leaving her wet clothes in a heap on the floor. Then there was a row between the two brothers. Johnny, on the pretext that Zachariah had not finished his dinner, got into the tub in hot haste, and the latter hustled him, saying that he did not mind Catherine going first, but he declined Johnny's rinsings, which, according to him, were black enough to supply the whole of the village with ink. The quarrel ended by their getting into the tub together, their faces equally turned to the wall. They even finished by rubbing each other's back and performing other friendly

offices. Then, like their sister, they scampered up stairs in a state of absolute nudity.

"They do make a mess, to be sure," muttered Mother Maheu, picking up the wet clothes to put them to the fire. "Alzira, just wipe up a bit."

She suddenly interrupted her remarks. From the other side of the wall there came the curses of a man, the sobs of a woman, the noise of a scuffle, of blows sounding like the knocking together of two empty gourds.

"La Levaque is getting her allowance," quietly observed Maheu, busy scraping his basin with his spoon. "What for, I wonder? Bouteloup said that the soup was ready."

"Ready, indeed," said his wife; "I saw the vegetables on the table; they weren't even washed."

The cries grew louder; there was a terrific rush that shook the wall, then all was still. "If the soup wasn't ready, that accounts for it," concluded the pitman, with the air of a judge summing up, and swallowing his last spoonful.

And after having gulped down a glass of water he attacked the pig's brawn. He cut it into cubes, which he picked up with the point of his knife and put them on his bread, without using a fork. When the father was eating no one spoke. He himself habitually ate in silence, and though his brawn did not taste like Maigrat's he asked no questions. He only inquired whether the old man was still in bed up stairs. He was told that the grandfather had gone out for his constitutional. Then there was another pause.

The smell of the meat had attracted the attention of Leonora and Henry, who were dabbling in the water spilled from the tub. Both came and stood by their father, the little one in front. They watched every mouthful, looking at it hopefully as it started from the plate, despairingly as it disappeared in the father's mouth.

In the end Maheu noticed the greedy glances that blanched their cheeks and moistened their lips.

"Have the children had any?" he asked.

His wife did not answer.

"You know I don't like that sort of thing. It takes my appetite away to see them standing there, begging for a morsel."

"Of course they've had some," she exclaimed angrily. "If you take notice of them you may give them your share and that of the others, too. They'll guzzle till they burst. Ask Alzira if we all hadn't some brawn?"

"Sure enough, mother," said the little cripple, who, on

such occasions told a lie with the assurance of grown-up people.

Leonora and Henry remained speechless with astonishment, inwardly revolting at such falsehoods; they who were whipped if they did not speak the truth. They felt as if their little hearts would break. They were about to protest, and to say that they were not there when the others had had their share.

"Get along with you," said the mother, driving them to the other end of the room. "You ought to be ashamed of yourselves, always having your nose in your father's plate. And if no one but him did get meat, doesn't he work for it, while you do nothing but cost money, and more than you are worth?"

But the father called them back. He took Henry on his right knee, Leonora on his left, and he finished his brawn, sharing with them. The children, delighted, guzzled it down as fast as he could cut it.

When it was all gone, he said to his wife, "Don't give me my coffee yet; I'll wash myself first. Just lend me a hand to empty these slops."

They each took a handle of the tub, and were emptying it into the gutter before the door, when Johnny came down in his dry clothes—a blue woolen blowse and trowsers to match, much too big for him, and falling into folds every where. Noticing him walking away so slyly, his mother stopped him. "Where are you going?"

"Over there."

"Where over there? Look here, you're going to cut a salad for to-night. Do you hear? If you don't bring back the salad, you'll have me to deal with."

"All right; all right."

And he walked away, his hands in his pockets, clanking his clogs and rolling his thin little carcass about like an old pitman. In another moment Zachariah came down. He was much more spruce in his black and blue woolen jersey. His father shouted to him not to be late; he merely shrugged his shoulders, shifted his pipe from one side of his mouth to the other, and strolled off without a word. The tub was once more filled with warm water, and Maheu was already taking off his jacket when, on a sign from her mother, Alzira, as usual, took Leonora and Henry outside to play. The father did not perform his ablutions in the presence of his children, as was done in many households in the village. But he blamed nobody; he simply said it was all very well for the children to potter about together.

"What are you doing up stairs?" shouted Mother Maheu at the bottom of the staircase.

"I'm mending my gown, which I tore yesterday," answered Catherine.

"Very well; don't come down. Your father is washing himself."

The husband and wife remained alone. The latter had put Estella on a chair, and feeling comfortable near the fire, she, for a wonder, did not cry, but kept staring vacantly at her parents like the unconscious being she was. Maheu, stripped to the bone, had squatted down in front of the tub, and began by ducking his head into it, after having well rubbed it with soft soap, the daily use of which discolored the hair of the race. After which he went into the water, belaboring himself energetically with both hands.

"I say, old man," she commenced, "I noticed your looks when you came in. You were worrying yourself, and the sight of the eatables relieved your mind. The folk at The Piolaine didn't give me a sou. They are nice enough; they have rigged out the little ones, and I felt ashamed to trouble them, for it sticks in my throat to have to ask."

She interrupted herself to put Estella straight on her chair, lest she should tumble off. The father continued his cleansing operations without hurrying the narrative by a single question. He was interested, and patiently awaited the conclusion.

"I must tell you that Maigrat refused me outright. He almost turned me out like a dog. You may imagine the treat I had. Not a morsel of any thing in the place. The woolen dresses were right enough to keep them warm; but it didn't put any thing in their insides, did it?"

Maheu raised his head, without saying a word—simply looking at her. Nothing at The Piolaine, nothing at Maigrat's; how then had she managed? But, as usual, she had tucked up her sleeves to rub his back and shoulders; and he let her take her own time to solve the riddle, merely straightening his back to stand her onslaught.

"So I went back to Maigrat's," she continued, "and gave him a bit of my mind. I told him that he had no heart, and that one day it would all come back to him, if there was justice in this world. It annoyed him; he kept turning his eyes; he would have liked to get away."

She went on rubbing him, making him shine like her own stewpans on her great cleaning days. She herself got into a perspiration, and felt so fatigued that she could only proceed in jerks.

"At last he called me an old bore. But we'll have bread till Saturday; and the best of it, he has lent me five francs. I took butter, coffee, and chicory. I should have got the brawn and the potatoes there also, but I noticed that he began to growl. Seven sous of brawn, eighteen sous of potatoes; I've got three francs and fifteen sous left for a stew and for a *pot-a-feu*" (a broth made with meat, vegetables, etc., left to simmer for a long while on a slow fire). "I didn't waste my morning, did I?"

By this time she was rubbing him dry. He, very comfortable, without worrying about the extra responsibility of this new debt, laughed heartily, and took her into his arms.

"That'll do, you old fool; I think that Maigrat——"

She was going to allude to Maigrat's recommendation to send Catherine for the future, when she bethought herself. What was the good of worrying the father?

"What about Maigrat?" asked Maheu.

"I fancy he is doing us;" she said, trying to drop the subject. "Catherine will have to look carefully over the bill." By this time he had finished washing, and put on a pair of dry trowsers. His great delight was to remain like this, bare to the waist. On his white skin, white like that of a girl, the coal had left some tattoo marks of which he was very proud, as well as of his powerful arms and brawny chest, veined like a block of marble. In the summer the miners were accustomed to stand in their doorways in that way. Notwithstanding the damp weather, Maheu went out for a moment and exchanged a few words across the gardens with a comrade equally stripped. Others made their appearance, their elbows dug into their ribs, and hailing each other with loud laughter. And the children, sprawling along the pavement, lifted their little heads and laughed, inhaling the fresh air after a tiring day's work.

While taking his coffee, still without his shirt, Maheu told his wife of the engineer's anger on account of the propping. He was calm and composed and listened with approving nods to the prudent counsels of Mother Maheu, who generally showed great sense in these things. She always maintained that it was of no use to fight against the company. After which she told him of the visit of Madame Hennebeau. Without admitting as much, both of them felt very proud of it.

"Can I come down?" inquired Catherine, at the top of the stairs.

"Yes, yes, your father is drying himself."

The young girl had put on her Sunday gown, a dark blue poplin, faded and somewhat shabby already in the folds. She had a plain black tulle cap on her head.

"What are you dressed for? Where are you going?"

"I am going to Montsou to buy a ribbon for my cap. I took the old one out, it was too dirty."

"I didn't know you had any money."

"No more I have. La Mouquette promised to lend me ten sous."

The mother let her go. But when her hand was on the door she called her back.

"Listen; don't buy your ribbon at Maigrat's. He'll only take you in, and he'll think we are rolling in gold."

The father, who was squatting before the fire still drying himself a bit here and there, merely called after her, "Just try and be in before dark."

In the afternoon Maheu worked in his garden. He had already planted potatoes, haricot beans, and peas; the day before he had been laying some shoots of lettuce and cabbage, which he now wanted to reset. This corner of the garden provided them with all the vegetables they wanted, save potatoes, of which they never had enough. Besides, he understood gardening very well, and even grew some artichokes, which was treated as a kind of presumption by his neighbors. And as he was getting his bed ready, Levaque came out in his own garden to smoke a pipe, looking at some salad which Bouteloup had set that morning. In fact, if it had not been for the lodger's digging, Levaque's plot of ground would have run to seed altogether. The men got talking to each other across the fence. Levaque refreshed, and wound up with having thrashed his wife, vainly tried to get Maheu to Rasseneur's. Things had come to a pretty pass if he was frightened at a mug of beer. They would have a game of skittles, a gossip, and come back to dinner. Of course there was no harm in it, but Maheu insisted upon resetting his cabbages. If he did not, they would be withered next morning. In reality, he refused from motives of economy, not caring to ask his wife for a penny of the remainder of the five francs.

It had just struck five when La Pierronne came to see whether Lydia had gone off with Johnny. Levaque answered that it was most likely, for Bébert had disappeared also, and the three were always gadding about together. When Maheu had eased their minds by telling them of the salad which Johnny had been told to go and pick, he and his mate began to tease the woman like a couple of saucy schoolboys. She was get-

ting vexed, but did not go away, inwardly pleased at their somewhat highly-seasoned jests, which made her cry out, though she stood complacently listening, twirling her thumbs all the while. At last an ossified specimen of her sex, whose stuttering anger manifested itself in a clucking noise, like that of a superannuated hen, came to her rescue. A more numerous audience, some applauding, some doing the reverse, had by this time gathered on their respective doorsteps, and were witnessing the scene from a distance. School was over, the infant population was disporting itself on the pavement likewise, yelling, fighting, and making itself generally conspicuous, while their sires, such as were not at the beershop, collected in groups of three and four, squatting on their haunches as if they were still in the mine, and sucking at their pipes with a few words exchanged amongst them far between. La Pierronne rushed away furiously when Levaque, still continuing his chaff, made a pretense of getting to close quarters, whereupon he decided to go to Rasseneur's by himself, leaving Maheu to plant his cabbages.

Night had come, and Mother Maheu lighted her lamp, fretting that the boys and girl had not returned. She could have staked her oath on it, they never managed to be together at the only meal which might have found them all gathered round the same board. Then there was this confounded salad of dandelion for which she was waiting. What, in the name of all that was good, could he pick in the dark, the drat of a boy? And it would just have been the very thing with the mash she had put on the fire—potatoes, leek, sorrel, and fried onion. The whole house smelled with it, with the savory smell that grows stale so quickly and which pervades the very bricks of miners' villages; which assails one's nostrils a mile off—the unmistakable fumes of the poor man's kitchen.

Maheu had left his garden at nightfall and fallen asleep on a chair, his head resting against the wall. The moment he sat down at night he went off. The clock struck seven; Henry and Leonora had just broken a plate whilst trying to help Alzira who was laying the table, when Daddy Jollycorpse came in. He was in a hurry to have his dinner and to get back to the pit.

"Let's have our dinner," said Mother Maheu, waking up her husband. "So much the worse for those who are not at home. They're big enough to know better; only I'm vexed about the salad."

CHAPTER XI.

CATHERINE'S COQUETRY.

AT Rasseneur's, Stephen, after having taken some soup, had gone up to the small room he was to occupy under the roof, and which overlooked the Voreux pit. Dead tired, he flung himself on his bed with all his clothes on. He had not had four hours' sleep during the last two days. When he awoke, it was getting dusk; for a moment he felt bewildered, failing to remember where he was. Ill at ease, with his head weighing a ton, he got slowly on his legs, with the idea of taking a mouthful of fresh air before dinner, and to go to bed immediately afterwards.

The weather had become milder and milder. There were some crimson rifts in the ink-black sky, laden with one of those long drizzles of northern climes, the warmth of which is felt in the air beforehand. Dusk was coming on apace, in vast gusts of mist that covered the distant horizon of the plain. On this immense ocean of reddish soil, the low-lying sky seemed to melt into a pall of sable dust; not a breath of wind animated its motionless shadows. A dull, lifeless melancholy hung over it all.

Stephen marched straight on, at random, having no other aim than to shake off his fever. When he passed in front of the Voreux pit, already wrapped in the darkness of night, because the lanterns were not alight as yet, he stopped for a moment watching the miners who worked by the day coming out. That must have been six which the clock struck just now, for the banksmen, wagoners, and others were coming out, mixed up with sifters, indistinct in the growing dusk, their presence only guessed at by the frequent shouts of laughter.

First and foremost came La Brulée and her son-in-law, Pierron, who passed close by the young man. She was blowing him up because he had not stood by her in a quarrel she had had with an inspector in reference to her number of shale.

"You big nincompoop, get along with you. You call yourself a man, and you creep before one of those brutes who live on our flesh and blood?"

Pierron kept by her side without answering. But at last he broke out—

"You'd like me to knock him down, perhaps, and to get into trouble afterwards. Much obliged; not if I know it."

"Very well; why don't you lie down and let him trample

upon you," she yelled. "D—— my bones, if my girl had only listened to me! I'd put some pluck into you, if I were in her place."

Their voices were lost in the distance. Stephen watched until the old firebrand had quite disappeared with her hook nose, her disheveled white locks fluttering in the night air, her skeleton arms gesticulating violently. But quite close the conversation of two young men made him prick up his ears. He had recognized the voice of Zachariah, who was waiting there, and whom his friend, young Mouque, had just joined.

"Are you coming?" asked the latter.

"Yes, presently; I have something to do first."

The banksman was going to say, "What?" but on turning round he noticed Philomena coming out of the sifting shed. He thought he understood. "Very well, I am going on in front."

"Very well, I'll come up with you."

A few steps further on, young Mouque met with his father, who had just come up from below. The two men simply said good night to each other; the son took the high road, the father the path by the canal.

Zachariah had already stopped Philomena, and was edging her towards the deserted path in spite of her resistance. She was in a hurry to get home, she could not stay; they were snapping at each other. She was tired of always being trotted about.

"I want to speak to you," he growled impatiently. He had his arm round her waist, and slowly led her down by the canal. Then when they came under the shadow of the mounds of shale, he asked her whether she had any money.

"What for?" she said.

He muttered something about owing two francs, of which he did not want them to know any thing at home.

"At home, indeed," she repeated. "I saw young Mouque; you are only going to the Volcano, after a lot of singing girls."

He denied, striking his breast, and swore that it was not so. Seeing that she continued to shrug her shoulders incredulously, he said abruptly—

"Come with me, if you like. For what I want with the singers, you won't be in the way. Are you coming?"

"And what about the baby?" she asked. "Just as if I could stir with a child that always cries. Let me go home. I bet they can't hear their own words."

But he would not get out of her way, and begged of her to give him some money. She assuredly did not want to shame

him before young Mouque, whom he had promised to join. A man could not go to roost every night with the fowls. She, already overcome, was fumbling with the seam of her jacket; she undid the stitching with her nail, and took some half-franc pieces from between the lining. Lest she should be robbed by her mother she hid the money of her overtime at the pit.

"I've got five, you see," she said; "I don't mind lending you three. But swear to me that you'll persuade your mother to let us marry! I've got enough of this kind of life. Besides, my mother grudges me every mouthful of food. Swear to me that you will."

She spoke quite slowly, with the passionless voice of the sickly girl simply tired of her life. He got excited, swore that it was an understood thing; then he got the money, kissed and fondled her, and made her laugh. She returned to the village by herself, while he cut across the fields, running as hard as he could to get up with his mate. Stephen had mechanically followed them from a distance, without understanding, merely fancying it was a lovers' meeting. His experience in Lille had taught him that young workgirls about these parts were very forward; he was accustomed to that kind of thing, and did not feel surprised at it. Another scene made him stop once more. At the foot of the mound of shale, in a large hole partially filled with bowlder, little Johnny was violently holding forth to Lydia and Bébert, the one seated on his right, the other on his left.

"What do you say?" he shouted. "I'll give you each a jolly good slap if you are not satisfied. Who thought of it first, just tell me?"

In fact, Little Johnny had had an idea. After having rolled about for an hour or so along the canal with the two others, all three picking dandelions, he had suddenly, when in front of the large bunch of salad, bethought himself that they would not want all of it at home. Therefore, instead of returning to the village he had gone to Montsou with Bébert to keep watch, while Lydia rang at the private houses to offer the greenstuff for sale. Experienced as he was already, he said that a girl would be sure to succeed better than a boy in that sort of thing. Excited by their first success, the whole bundle had gone, and the lassie had made eleven sous. And now having sold out they were dividing their gains.

"It isn't fair," declared Bébert, "you should divide into three. If you keep seven sous there'll be only two sous for each of us."

"What isn't fair?" asked Johnny, furiously. "First of all, I picked the most."

The other generally submitted with a kind of cowardly admiration and a gullibility that made him the constant victim of his playfellow. Older and stronger than the latter, he suffered himself to be knocked about. But this time the idea of all this money incited him to resistance.

"He is robbing us, isn't he, Lydia? If he doesn't share fair we'll tell his mother."

Whereupon Johnny put his fist in his face.

"Just say that again, if you dare. If you don't hold your tongue I'll go and tell your mother that you sold my mother's salad. And besides, idiot that you are, can I divide eleven sous into three? Just try, you who think yourself so clever. Here are your two sous each. Make haste or I pocket the lot."

Bébert, thoroughly cowed, accepted the two sous. Lydia, trembling all over, had not said a word. When in Johnny's presence she felt a kind of loving fear which a woman not unfrequently feels for the husband who beats her. As he was tendering the two sous she held out her hand with a submissive smile. Suddenly he bethought himself.

"After all, what would you do with all this money? Your mother would only take it away if you couldn't hide it somewhere. I'd better keep it for you. When you want money, you can ask me."

And the nine sous disappeared in his pocket. To prevent her from protesting he had put his arms around her neck and began kissing her. They both laughed; she was quite used to being kissed; in fact, she was always trotting after him and hugging him in corners to the evident annoyance and jealousy of Bébert, who often interrupted their gambols by the announcement of some imaginary person coming along.

"Look out! there is some one coming," he shouted.

This time he spoke the truth; Stephen had just come in sight. The children ran away. He simply passed on, skirting the mound of shale and taking the path by the canal. He inwardly laughed at Johnny's tricks; they were not surprising with the examples he had constantly before him. But the effects of this diversion did not last long, Stephen felt sad at heart. A score of yards further on he met with some more couples. By the time he had reached the old Roquillart pit he was surrounded on all sides by them. It was the lovers' trysting place; a succession of solitary waste ground, bestrewn with the decaying woodwork of two sheds that had tumbled to ruin and the skeleton timbers of the settle-boards, the uprights of which still remained standing. Old and useless rolling stock, half rotten props, lay there in heaps, whilst a

luxuriant vegetation tried, as it were, to reconquer this patch of soil, and showed itself in young, vigorous shoots and thick matted grass. Hence the spot was cut out as it were for the meeting of lovers, who found themselves at home there, notwithstanding Daddy Mouque, who was supposed to perform the duties of watchman. The company had given him a kind of tenement, consisting of two rooms, almost under the dismantled top of the shaft, the still remaining crazy timbers of which constantly threatened to bury the whole in their fall. He had even been obliged to shore part of the ceiling, but he did not seem to mind it, and felt very comfortable there with his family; he and his son in one room, La Mouquette in the other. As there was not a single pane of glass left, he had boarded up his windows. The process excluded the light, but it also excluded the cold; he paid no heed to any thing else, least of all to the ruins of the Requillart pit, the shaft of which had been left to serve as a chimney for the ventilating furnace of the adjacent mine. He simply went to and fro to the Voreux pit to attend to his horses.

And it was thus that Daddy Mouque grew old amidst the billings and cooings of the young generation. As for his own daughter, he closed his eyes to her misconduct, seeing that she ever treated him with respect, and never introduced her swains into his home. He saw so much going on around him that he became callous to that kind of thing. On his way to and from the pit he could not go a step without running against some couple; it was the same when he went to pick firewood or green stuff for his rabbits. Both he and the lovers had got so used to each other that neither of them took the least notice. Every now and then the sight of them inspired the old man with reminiscences of his own youth; he simply smiled and shrugged his shoulders, asking nothing of them save not to come too close to his own home and not to talk too loud lest they should disturb him in his naps.

Every evening Daddy Mouque received a visit from his old friend Jollycorpse, who regularly took the same walk before his dinner. The two old men scarcely spoke to each other, barely exchanged a dozen words during the half hour they remained together. But it enlivened them to be in each other's company like this; thinking at the same time of bygone things, the cud of which they chewed without feeling any need to speak of them. They seated themselves side by side on some log of wood, near the abandoned pit, just uttered a monosyllable now and then, and gave the rein to their fancy, not lifting their eyes from the ground. No doubt they went

back to their youthful days. Around them there was laughter and kissing, the fresh voices of the young folk, their love-sick whispers falling pleasantly upon the silent night air. It was more than forty-three years ago that Daddy Jollycorpse had been courting his wife, a weakly trammer girl, on the self-same spot.

Ah, those were golden days! And the two old men, nodding their heads, often left each other without saying as much as good night.

However, on this particular evening, just as Stephen appeared in sight, Daddy Jollycorpse, who was getting up to return to the village, said to his friend:

"Good night, old man. I say, do you remember Carrots?"

The other remained silent for a moment, then nodded his head, and went into his cottage, muttering:

"Good night, old fellow, good night."

Stephen took their place on the log. His sadness increased without his knowing why. The old man, whose back he watched disappearing in the dark, reminded him of his arrival that morning, and of the avalanche of words dragged from him in the nervousness produced by the hurricane, no doubt. What misery all round! And then those girls dead with fatigue, these men laboring harder than niggers, who were thinking of raising another generation of victims to suffering and laborious hardship. Would it never end, then, this peopling of the world with men and women, doomed from their very birth to hunger and degradation? Would it not be better to be born no more, to fly from temptation, to discard nature's laws? Perhaps these somber thoughts were chasing each other through his brain, because he felt alone, while the others went by two by two. The murky night air was oppressing him, while the first large drops of a shower scarcely cooled his lammy, feverish hands.

As he sat there in the shade, scarcely stirring, a couple coming from Montsou, and going in the direction of the pit, brushed past without seeing him. The girl, young and timid, no doubt, was hanging back, praying of the young man to let her go, while he, silent but obstinate, gently pulled her along, towards that part of the ground wrapped in utter darkness. It was Catherine and tall Chaval. But Stephen had not recognized them, he merely watched them without moving, rather amused than otherwise at the solitary instance of mild revolt he had noticed hitherto.

On leaving the village Catherine proceeded to Montsou by the high road. From the age of ten, from the time she earned

her own living at the pit, she had gone about the place all alone, in this complete freedom of the miners' children. When she found herself in front of the company's yards she crossed the road and went into a laundress's shop, where she felt certain of meeting with La Mouquette. The latter passed hour upon hour there with the ironers, who treated themselves to "goes" of coffee from morn till night. But a great disappointment was in store for her. La Mouquette had just been standing treat in her turn, and could not lend her the promised ten sous. In vain she tried to console her by offering her a glass of hot coffee. She would not even allow La Mouquette to borrow from a third party for her. A sudden idea of economy came to her, a kind of superstitious fear, the feeling that if she bought it now, the ribbon would bring her ill-luck.

She made haste to get back to the village, and had just reached the last houses of Montsou when a man, standing in the doorway of Piquette's cookshop, called out to her:

"Hallo, Catherine, what's your hurry?"

It was tall Chaval. She felt vexed; not that she disliked him, but she did not feel in the humor of talking with him.

"Come in a minute and have some hot coffee."

She refused prettily, saying that it was getting dark, and that she was in a hurry; they were waiting for her at home. He had come towards her, and in the middle of the street was pressing her in a low voice to come in—to sit down in his room and have a chat. He was acting upon a plan he had nursed for a long while. She, without pretending to be offended, merely laughed, telling him that she could not think of such a thing. They stood chatting, one word led to another, and without knowing how she mentioned about the ribbon.

"But I'll treat you to one," he said.

She blushed, feeling that she had better refuse once more. Then the idea of merely accepting it as a loan came to her, and she said "Yes," on condition that she should pay him back. He merely nodded and replied that she should repay him when she liked. Then there was another difficulty when he wanted to go to Maigrat's.

"No, not at Maigrat's, mother told me not to go there."

"What's the odds? you needn't tell her where you bought it. He has the prettiest ribbons in Montsou."

When Maigrat saw tall Chaval and Catherine enter his shop like two lovers buying their wedding presents, he turned crimson. He showed his pieces of blue ribbon with the rage of a man who suspects that he is being made a fool of. When he had served the two young people he planted himself

on his doorstep and watched them walk away in the gathering darkness. His wife, timidly coming to ask about something just then, he turned round upon her, swore at her and shouted that one day or other he would make her repent sticking up for the dirty lot, who were wanting in gratitude, while they ought to stoop down and kiss his feet.

For Chaval accompanied Catherine on her road. He was walking by her side, swinging his arms. Only he kept close to her, leading her without pretending to do so. Suddenly she noticed that he had made her leave the high road, and that they were going in the direction of the Requillart pit. But he left her no time to protest; he had put his arm round her waist; he was coaxing her with a flow of honeyed words, and she, who had expected all this, listened submissively. He seemed to be fond of her; yet, as she drank in his soft protestations, the image of another man, whom she had only met for the first time this morning, came between him and her. But only for a moment; the next, she felt powerless, and allowed herself to be led whither Chaval pleased.

The very man whose image uprose before her was seated within a few steps, motionless, scarcely paying attention to any thing around him. Suddenly he awoke from his reverie, and prepared to go. He had only proceeded a few yards, when on turning round he saw the couple behind him. The man had his arms round the girl's waist, and was bending over her; the girl seemed in a hurry and vexed at being belated.

Stephen suddenly felt that he should like to see their faces. The next moment he said to himself that it was idiotic; what, after all, did it matter to him who they were? Probably utter strangers. Hence, in order not to give way to this senseless curiosity, he strode along as fast as he could. But in spite of himself his steps became slower and slower, and at the first lamp stopped altogether. Then Stephen hid himself in the shade, so as to have a good look at them as they passed. He stood as if nailed to the spot when he recognized Catherine and tall Chaval. At first he refused to believe his own eyes. It could not be Catherine, this girl in a blue dress, without a bonnet. Was this the girl whom he had taken for a boy this morning in her linen trowsers, her head wrapped in a handkerchief? That's why she could brush past him without his guessing who she was. But he doubted no longer, he had just seen her eyes, with their greenish transparency, clear and deep, like water in a well, and he felt an irresistible and unreasoning desire to be revenged by withering her with his contempt.

After all, the dress of her own sex did not suit her at all. She was horrid.

Catherine and Chaval had slowly sauntered by. They had no suspicion of being watched in this manner. He was still detaining her, stooping down to kiss her; she received his caresses with a childish, rippling laughter. Now that he had remained behind, Stephen was obliged, as it were, to follow them, and he felt furious at their being in his path and at making him the unwilling witness of their cooings, which exasperated him. It was true, then, what she had sworn this morning; she was not intimate with this man, and he, who did not believe her, had wished to behave honorably. And this fellow who had had no such scruples. It made him mad to think of it; he clenched his fists, he would have killed this man, taken as he was with one of those fits of fury in which he saw nothing but blood.

The walk lasted for half an hour. When the couple got to the Voreux pit they went slower still, they stopped twice by the side of the canal, thrice by the mound of shale, talking to and fondling each other. Stephen stopped also, not wishing to be seen. Then, when he did regain his liberty, he persisted, nevertheless, in following them. He accompanied them to the village, and remained standing there in the shade for a quarter of an hour, waiting until Chaval let Catherine go home after two more kisses, the sound of which reached him where he stood. And when he had made quite sure that they had left each other, he set out once more on the road to Marchiennes, striding along without thinking about any thing in particular; too oppressed, too sad, to shut himself up in his room.

An hour later, towards nine o'clock, Stephen crossed the village again, saying to himself that if he was to be up at three, he had better get something to eat and go to bed. The village was already fast asleep, wrapped in the darkness of the night. Not a glimmer behind the closed shutters; the long frontages showed their uniform lines, silent, like a barracks given up to heavy slumber. A solitary cat was bounding across the deserted gardens. It was the wind-up of the day's work, the workmen dragging themselves from their meals to their beds, heavy with fatigue and food.

At Rasseneur's, where the lights were still burning, an engineman and two men of the day shift were sipping their beer. But before going in Stephen cast a last look at the darkness all round. There was the same impenetrable gloom of the morning, when he had come along in the howling storm

In front, the Voreux pit was crouching like a beast of prey, dim, vague; only lighted up by the flicker of the lanterns. The flames of the three braziers at the top of the mound of shale leaped into the air like sanguinary moons, showing every now and then the elongated shadows of Daddy Jollycorpse and his yellow horse. And beyond, in the level plain, every thing was wrapped in gloom; Montsou, Marchiennes, the forest of Vandame, the vast ocean of turnips and wheat, with the blue flames of the smelting furnaces and the red ones of the coke ovens flashing like distant beacons. Gradually the gloom grew denser still, the rain was falling slowly, continuously, drowning every thing in its monotonous drip, drip, drip; while one solitary sound was heard above it all, the thick and heavy breathing of the pumping engine, panting day and night.

CHAPTER XII.

SIGNS OF COMING TROUBLE.

THE next morning and henceforth Stephen resumed his work at the pit. He was getting accustomed to it. He regulated his existence in accordance with these new duties and habits that had seemed so hard to him at the beginning. One solitary incident relieved the monotony of the first fortnight. He was taken with a fever which kept him in bed for forty-eight hours, his limbs disjointed, as it were, his brain on fire, and in its semi-delirium fancying that its owner was obstinately pushing his truck through a way so narrow as not to admit of his body even. It was simply the strain put upon him by his apprenticeship, an excess of fatigue from which he recovered at once.

And the days came and went, weeks, months elapsed. Like his comrades, he got up at three, drank his coffee, took his lunch, which Madame Rasseneur prepared over night. On going to the pit of a morning he regularly met with Daddy Jollycorpse on his way home, and on returning in the afternoon he met with him again going to his labor. He had the handkerchief tied round his head, he wore the linen trowsers and jacket, he shivered and roasted his back at the large fire. Then came the wait in the receiving shed, with bare feet, his body almost cut in twain by the draughts. But the engine.

with its bright steel and brass flashing in the shade, pre-occupied him no longer; nor did the cables flying upwards silently, like some black night-bird, nor the cages plunging down, and reappearing incessantly amidst the noise of the signals and the trucks rumbling over the iron floor. His lamp burned badly; the man had probably neglected it; he swore at him, and only recovered his temper when young Mouque put them all in the cage, slapping the girls on the back as a kind of valediction. The cage started, dropped like a stone down a well, without as much as a glance at the departing daylight on his part. He never thought of the possibility of an accident; the lower he went in the beating rain the more he felt at home. When they reached the bottom and the cage was unbolted by Pierron, with his kind of beetling look, there was always the same tramping off, as each gang went to its own cutting with dragging steps. In a short time he knew the galleries better than the streets of Montsou, knew exactly where to turn, where to stoop, where to avoid a pool of water. He got so used to these two miles of underground passage that he might have traveled them without a lamp, with his hands in his pocket. And the same incidents repeated themselves each day; a viewer holding up his lamp to look at the miners as they passed, Daddy Mouque leading a horse, Bébert driving Bataille, who set up whinnying, Johnny running behind the train and shutting the ventilating doors, and stout La Mouquette and little Lydia pushing their trucks.

After a while, Stephen suffered less also from the dampness and oppression of the cutting. The chimney seemed to him very comfortable to get up and down in, as if now he had the faculty of melting and of squeezing himself through cracks, where formerly he would not have risked his hand. He inhaled the coal dust without the least discomfort, saw as clear in the gloom as in the daylight, perspired without complaining, and got used to wearing his wet clothes from morn till night. He no longer wasted his strength to no purpose; he had become so adroit and quick as to astonish the gang.

At the end of three weeks he was quoted among the skillful trammers of the pit; no one trundled a truck to the inclined plane and started it afterwards as quickly or as cleverly as he. His small size allowed him to pass every where, and his arms, though smooth and white like a woman's, seemed made of iron, so well did they discharge their fatiguing work. He never complained, no doubt from pride, though he might be ready to drop. They only reproached him with not being

able to take chaff; he got angry the moment they attempted it. Save for that he was accepted and looked upon as a real pitman, in proportion to the force of habit gradually reducing him to the level of a mere machine.

Amidst this general esteem Maheu, above all, had taken a great fancy to Stephen. It was bred from the former's respect for work ably done. Besides, like the others, he felt that this lad had been educated better than himself; he saw him read and write and sketch bits of plans, heard him talk of things of whose very existence he had up till now been ignorant. It did not surprise him, colliers being less apt to learn than enginemen, but he was struck by the pluck of this youngster, by the devil-may-care way in which "he had bitten into the coal," so as not to die with starvation. It was the first casual that had got acclimatized so quickly. Hence, when they were pressed for time and he would not trouble a hewer, he charged the young man with the propping, feeling certain of it being well and solidly done. The chiefs were always worrying about the confounded thing; he always felt afraid of a visit from Engineer Négrel, who was sure to be accompanied by Dansaert. Both would dispute and find fault with every thing. He fancied, however, that the propping and shoring of his trammer met with more of these gentlemen's approval, notwithstanding their grumbling and their threats of the company taking some radical measures one day. As things went on, a growing spirit of discontent prevailed among the men. Maheu himself, usually so calm, ended by clenching his fists in a rage.

At first there had been a kind of rivalry between Zachariah and Stephen. One evening they had threatened to come to blows. But the former had been obliged in the end to admit the superiority of the new comer, good-natured withal, not caring a jot for any thing, and easily appeased by the friendly offer of a mug of beer. Levaque also showed him a kinder face, talked politics with the trammer, who, he averred, "had something in his noddle." And among the men working at piece-work Stephen felt conscious of the hostility of one only —tall Chaval. Not that they sulked; on the contrary, they had become very good friends; only their eyes devoured each other when they were joking together. Between the two Catherine had resumed the even tenor of her uneventful and resigned existence, bending in twain, pushing her truck, bestowing an ever-pleasant smile upon her fellow trammer, who often came to her aid now; on the other hand, very submissive to Chaval, suffering his caresses in public. Stephen

often teased Catherine about these strolls round and round the mound of shale. She replied in the same bantering tone, but Stephen had only to look her straight in the face to produce a change. The quasi-defiant voice dropped to a gentle one, she felt confused and turned pale. At such moments they both turned their heads away, and often kept for hours without exchanging a word. They seemed to hate each other for reasons deeply buried in their own hearts, and which they never ventured to explain.

Spring had come. One day on stepping out of the cage Stephen had received full in the face this gust of warm April air, this sweet smell of the young soil, of the tender verdure of life-giving breath—and now, as the days went by, spring smelled sweeter each time, and diffused its gentle heat—after ten hours' work below in this eternal winter, amidst the damp gloom, which summer seemed powerless to change. The days grew longer, and in May he descended as the sun rose, sprinkling the golden sky with crimson dusk, amidst which the fleecy steam of the valves showed pink and soft. He no longer shivered; a warm breath came from the far-off plain, while the lark sang on high. Then, at three o'clock he felt dazzled by the burning sun, setting on fire the horizon, tinting crimson the bricks under their layers of dust. In June the corn fields were already thick with waving masses of blueish green, contrasting with the somberer hue of the turnips. It was an endless ocean, falling and rising with the slightest breath of wind. He watched it grow day by day, often surprised to find it different in the evening from what he had left it in the morning. Above all, the poplars of the canal were donning their garb of foliage. Grass sprouted on the mound of shale, flowers covered the fields, life sprang every where from the soil, while he below dragged out his own in privation and misery.

When Stephen took his walks at night he no longer startled the lover couples round the mound of shale. Zachariah and Philomena sauntered there mechanically. Johnny and Lydia hopped about like young lambs; as for La Mouquette, she was here, there, and every where. The young man blamed no one; he had a kind word for all he met, save for Catherine and Chaval. When he came across them he turned sharp on his heel, the country had lost its charm for that evening, he preferred spending it at Rasseneur's.

"Give me a mug of beer, Madame Rasseneur. No, I'll not go out to-night; my legs are bending under me." And turning towards a comrade, who was generally seated there at

the end of the room, his head resting against the wall, he said:

"Souvarine, won't you take something?"

"No, thank you; not any thing."

Stephen had made the acquaintance of Souvarine, who was living in the same house, door by door. He was an engineman at the Voreux pit who occupied the furnished room next to his up stairs. He looked about thirty, slight, with clean-cut features, and long fair hair and close-cropped beard. His small, sharp, white teeth, his aquiline nose, and prettily-shaped mouth made him appear like a girl, notwithstanding his stubborn face, which the pale reflection of his steel-gray eyes lighted up with a flash of savageness now and then. In his poorly-furnished room there was nothing but a box of papers and books. He was a Russian, never spoke about himself, indifferent to the legends current with reference to him. The pitmen, very suspicious with foreigners, recognized him to belong to a class different from their own by his tiny, soft hands, and had at first imagined in connection with him some adventure, some crime, from the consequences of which he was hiding. But he had shown himself so friendly towards them, without the least pride, distributing his coppers among the children of the village, that by now they had accepted him as one of their own, reassured by the words "political refugee," in the vague sense of which they saw an excuse for crime itself and a kind of fellowship in suffering.

The first weeks Stephen had found him reserved almost to bearishness. Hence he only knew his history much later on. Souvarine was the last born of a noble family belonging to Toula. At St. Petersburg, where he studied medicine, the Socialistic mania which turned the heads of the Russian youth had decided him to learn a handicraft, that of a working engineer, to mix with the people, and to come to their aid like a brother. And it was by this trade that he now got his bread, after having had to fly in consequence of a miscarried attempt on the life of the Emperor. For a month he had lived in the cellar of a fruiterer, digging a mine under a street, manufacturing bombshells at the hourly risk of being blown up with the house. Disowned by his family, without money, regarded in every French workshop as a foreigner who might be a spy, he was starving when the Montsou company engaged him during a stress of business. For the last twelve months he had been with them, discharging his duties like a capital, sober, and well-behaved workman, working the night shift one week, and the day shift the next, and withal so punctual as to be held up as an example by his superiors.

"You are never thirsty, then?" inquired Stephen, laughing.

And in a soft tone, almost without a foreign accent, he answered, "I am only thirsty when I eat."

His companion often bantered him about the girls, taxed him with having been seen walking with a trammer girl round about "Silk Stockings." He merely shrugged his shoulders with a quiet indifference. Woman was simply a comrade to him, provided she had the courage and the fraternal capabilities of the man. Short of these he saw no use in opening his heart to any feeling that might possibly unman him. He wanted neither wife nor friend, nor any tie; he wished to be as free with his own blood as with that of others.

Every evening towards nine o'clock, when the tavern grew empty, Stephen remained chatting with Souvarine. He slowly sipped his beer, while the other smoked cigarette after cigarette, the juice of which had stained his taper fingers. His dreamy mystic eyes seemed to watch the cloudlets of smoke as if in a vision, his left hand, nervously fidgeting for some object of which to clutch hold, kept gently beating the air; he generally ended by taking on his knee a domesticated rabbit, which he himself had christened Poland, had taken a violent fancy to him, smelled his legs, cuddled up against him, put up its paws until he took it into his arms like an infant. Then, snugly pressed against him, its ears drooping, it shut its eyes, while he, with a soft, caressing, unconscious motion, kept constantly stroking its gray silky coat, apparently calmed by the gentle breathing contact of the animal.

"You know," said Stephen one evening, "I had another letter from Pluchart."

No one was near but Rasseneur. The last customer had just left for the village, which was making ready to go to bed.

"Indeed," exclaimed the landlord, coming toward his two lodgers. "What account does Pluchart give of himself?" For the last two months Stephen had kept up a constant correspondence with the enginewright at Lille. He had had the fancy of apprising the latter of his being taken on at Montsou, and struck by the idea of the propaganda of which the young man might make himself the vehicle among the miners, Pluchart was now indoctrinating him.

"He says this much; that the association in question is getting on very well. It appears to be gathering adherents from all sides."

"What say you to their idea?" asked Rasseneur, of Souvarine.

The latter, who was gently scratching Poland's head, blew off a whiff of smoke, and said in his softest tone, "More rubbish."

Stephen got excited. His revolutionary instinct had thrown him into the struggle of labor against capital with all the illusions bred from ignorance. They were alluding to the International Association of Labor, to this famous "International" which had just been started in London. Was it not a supreme effort, a heroic campaign, in which justice was to prevail at last? No more frontiers, the labor of the world uprising, combining to insure the workman the bread to which he was entitled. And how grand and simple was this organization: at the base the section representing the commune; then federation, the device that would group the sections; higher up still, the nation; and at the very top humanity entire incarnated in a general council, in which each nation would be represented by a corresponding secretary. Before six months were over, the world would be conquered, the workmen would dictate their laws to the employers if the latter proved refractory.

"Rubbish," repeated Souvarine. "I have talked it over with some one. Your Karl Marx is still at the A B C of the thing, he wants to act by natural forces. No politics, no conspiracy, every thing above board and simply in order to raise wages. Don't bother me with all this nonsense, with your evolution. I am for stronger measures."

Stephen laughed. He would not always look at things in the light of his comrade, whose theory seemed to him so much affectation. Rasseneur, more practical still, with the good sense of a man who has something to lose, did not think it worth while to discuss. He simply wished to put things in their proper place.

"Then you are going to try to establish a section at Montsou?"

Such was the wish of Pluchart, who was secretary to the Northern Federation. He laid particular stress on the services which the association would render to the miners if they struck one day. Stephen appeared to think this strike very imminent; this trouble about the propping would be sure to end badly; it only wanted one or two more exactions of the company to drive the pitmen to revolt.

"The bother is those subscriptions," said Rasseneur in a weighty tone. "Fifty centimes a year for the general fund, and two francs for the section, it looks like nothing. Still I'd wager that many will refuse to pay them."

"The more reason that they ought to begin here by starting a providence fund, which, in case of need, might become a fund to fall back upon for resistance," remarked Stephen. "But we can think of this later on. I am ready if the others are."

There was a moment of silence. The paraffine lamp stood smoking on the counter. Through the open door the sound of a stoker feeding the furnace at the Voreux pit was distinctly heard.

"Every thing is so dear," resumed Madame Rasseneur, who had come in and been listening with a somber mien, her tall stature still further enlarged by its everlasting casing of black. "If I tell you that I pay for eggs twenty-two sous——There must be a 'burst up.'"

This time the three men were agreed. They spoke one after the other in a despairing tone. They could not but bewail things. The workman was unable to stand it any longer. The revolution had only aggravated his misery; it was the employers who were getting fat since '89, without leaving as much to the workers as the scraping out of the dishes. Would any one maintain that the latter had enjoyed their fair share of the extraordinary increase of wealth and material welfare of the last hundred years? They had been befooled by being declared free; yes, free they were to die of starvation, and a good many availed themselves of the freedom. It did not put bread in the cupboard to be able to vote for a set of humbugs who took it easy enough afterwards, without caring any more about the wretches who had elected them than about their old shoes. No; there must be an end to all this, one way or the other, either gently and lawfully, by a thorough and cordial understanding, or savagely, by burning down every thing and eating one another. The children would assuredly see all this come to pass, if their parents did not, because the century could not come to an end without another revolution; this time the one of the workmen, a kind of general "flare up," which would pull down society from top to bottom, and would rebuild it on a more equitable and proper footing.

"There will have to be a spill," energetically repeated Madame Rasseneur.

"Yes, yes," exclaimed the three men; "there will have to be a spill."

Souvarine was stroking the ears of Poland, whose nostrils dilated with pleasure. His eyes looked dreamily into vacancy without appearing to address himself to the others, but communing with himself as it were, he said, softly, "To raise

wages is all very well, but can it be done? They seem to be fixed by an iron law to the smallest sum possible, just sufficient to allow of the workman having bread and children. If these wages were to fall too low, the workman would die, and the demand for new men would make them rise. If they were to go up too much the supply would exceed the demand, and that would make them go down again. It is the equilibrium of empty stomachs, the life sentence to the hulks of starvation."

When he ran on in that way, taking up the subjects like an educated Socialist, Stephen and Rasseneur became fidgety, troubled by his despairing assertions, to which they failed to find an answer.

"I tell you," he went on, in his accustomed quiet manner, and this time looking at them, "that you must adopt strong measures, otherwise hunger will only sprout up again. Yes, the earth must be cleansed and purified. After that we'll devise."

"Monsieur is very right," declared Madame Rasseneur, whose most revolutionary outbreaks were invariably accompanied by exceeding politeness.

Stephen, in despair at his ignorance, wanted to cut short the discussion. He rose, saying, "Let's go to bed. All this will not prevent my having to get up at three o'clock."

Souvarine, previous to having blown away the bits of cigarette sticking to his lips, had already gently put his arm around the big rabbit and set it down. Rasseneur was shutting up the house. They all went up stairs silently, their ears buzzing, with their heads full of the questions they had discussed.

And each evening there were similar conversations in the bare room over the solitary mug of beer which it took Stephen an hour to sip. All the vague notions, slumbering within him until now, were fomenting, enlarging themselves. Racked by the wish to know, he had hesitated a long while before asking for books of his fellow-lodger, who, unfortunately, had no other than German and Russian ones. But at last he managed to get hold of a French volume on co-operative societies, which was equally dismissed as so much rubbish by Souvarine. Stephen also read a journal regularly received by the latter, *The Struggle*, an anarchist sheet published at Geneva. But in spite of their daily intercourse, Stephen found the Russian as close as ever, with his air of simply bivouacking in life, without interests, without feelings, without possessions of any kind.

It was towards the middle of July that an improvement took place in Stephen's position. An incident had broken the monotonous, uneventful existence at the mine. The men of the William vein had come upon a shift in the beds which foretold of a break. In fact, the latter soon showed itself, to the great surprise of the engineers, who, notwithstanding their knowledge of the ground, had not suspected such a thing. It upset the whole of the pit; nothing was talked of but the vein that had disappeared, slid down, no doubt, to reappear at the other end of the out-throw. Old, experienced miners already sniffed keenly, like hounds momentarily thrown off the scent. Meanwhile the men could not remain idle, and notices were posted up announcing that the company was going to adjudicate by auction the working of some new cuttings.

One day, coming out of the pit, Maheu took Stephen aside and offered him to enter his gang as a hewer, instead of Levaque, who passed to another cutting. The matter had been already arranged with the head viewer and the engineer, who professed themselves satisfied with the young man. Hence Stephen had only to accept this quick advancement, well pleased at this proof of Maheu's growing esteem.

In the evening they returned together to the pit to take cognizance of the notices. The cuttings put up for tender were at the Filonnière vein, in the north gallery of the Voreux pit. They by no means promised to be profitable; the old miner repeatedly shook his head while Stephen was reading out the conditions to him. In fact, the next morning when he had taken him down to visit the cutting, he pointed out to him its distance from the landing place, the bowldery nature of the ground, the thinness of the bed, and the hardness of the coal. Nevertheless, if they were to eat, they had to work. Accordingly they went on the following Sunday to the public adjudication, which took place in the receiving staith, and which, in the absence of the engineer of the division, was presided over by the engineer of the pit, assisted by the head viewer. From five to six hundred pitmen were there in front of the little rostrum put up in a corner, and the adjudications went on so quickly that nothing was heard but an indistinct sound of voices, of figures shouted out, and almost immediately drowned by the mention of other figures.

For a moment Maheu feared being unable to obtain one of the forty jobs offered by the company. All the competitors lowered their prices, uneasy as they were at the rumors of a crisis, and struck with the panic of being thrown out. Engineer Négrel knew better than to hurry over the business, con-

fronted by this anxiety to make sure of something; he quietly allowed the tenders to fall to the lowest figure possible, while, on the other hand, Dansaert, anxious to rush matters, stood mendaciously expatiating upon the excellence of the bargains. To get his clear fifty yards of cutting in front of him, Maheu was obliged to underbid a mate, who proved equally tenacious; they each kept taking off a centime (tenth part of a penny) from the price of the truckful. And if Maheu remained the victor it was by coming down so low that viewer Richomme, who was standing behind him, swore between his teeth, nudged him with his elbow, and averred, growling, that he would never be able to make it pay at that rate.

When they came out Stephen muttered and cursed. And he burst out before Chaval, who was coming back from a walk with Catherine, while his prospective father-in-law had minded the business of them all.

"That's what I call a slaughter, if you like," he shouted. "That's their latest game, to make the workman devour his fellows."

Chaval was getting angry; he would have never come down, he said. And Zachariah himself, who was there from mere curiosity, declared that it was disgusting. But Stephen, with a scarcely contained gesture of violence, made them hold their tongues.

"There will be an end to all this. We'll be the masters one day."

Maheu, who had been silent ever since he came out of the shed, seemed to wake up. "The masters," he repeated. "D——n it, it'll be high time."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE FÊTE OF MONTSOU.

IT was the last Sunday in July, the day of the annual fête of Montsou. Early on Saturday night the tidy matrons of the miners' village had had a general cleaning up, a downright deluge, buckets of water dashed against the walls and on the brick floors, the latter of which were not dry as yet, notwithstanding the white sand with which they had been bestrewn, a luxury rather costly to these poor purses. The day prom-

ised to be a very hot one, however; one of those heavy skies, big with coming storms, and which oppress these flat and seemingly endless northern parts in summer, was hanging over the whole like a pall of red-hot iron.

Sunday generally upset the routine of rising among the Maheus. While the father, from the stroke of five, fidgeted in his bed, got up at last and dressed himself, notwithstanding his leisure, the children cuddled themselves up till nine. On that particular Sunday Maheu went to smoke a pipe in his garden, and came back to eat a slice of bread by himself while waiting. He spent his morning pottering about without knowing exactly how; he mended a bucket that was leaking, and stuck a portrait of the Prince Imperial, that had been given to the little ones, under the clock. Presently, the others came down one by one; first, Daddy Jollycorpse, who took a chair outside to warm himself in the sun; the mother and Alzira afterwards. They immediately began their cooking preparations, and when Catherine made her appearance, with Leonora and Henry, whom she had dressed, it was on the stroke of eleven. The smell of the rabbit, which was boiling with the potatoes, already pervaded the house, when Zachariah and Johnny came down last of all, their eyes moist with sleep and still yawning. Every where the mining village was astir in expectation of the fair, and briskly preparing for the dinner, which was being hurried in order to be off as quickly as possible to Montsou. Groups of children kept running to and fro, men in shirt sleeves and slippers down at heel loafed about with the lazy unconcern of the day of rest. The doors and windows thrown wide open to the warm air showed the long rows of house-rooms, buzzing with noise and swarming with the confusion of large families all at home at the same time. And from one end to the other of the various blocks there arose the smell of rich cookery which on that day struggled successfully with the inveterate fumes of the fried onion.

The Maheus sat down to their meal at the stroke of twelve. They were quiet enough amidst the gossip that went on from door to door, the chattering of the women, constantly bawling to each other, in their mutual borrowing of kitchen utensils, the hubbub of the little ones admonished by slaps. Besides, for the last three weeks they had fallen out with their neighbors, the Levaques, on the subject of Zachariah's marriage with Philomena. The men spoke to each other, but the women affected to be utter strangers. This coolness had tightened the bonds of intimacy with La Pierronne. Only the latter, leaving her husband and Lydia with her mother, had started

very early in the morning to spend the day with an aunt at Marchiennes. They all chaffed about it; they knew the aunt, she had mustaches, and was head viewer at the Voreux pit. Mother Maheu declared that it was not decent to leave one's family on the Sunday of the fête.

Besides the potatoes and boiled rabbit, which had been fattened up in the pent-house for the last month, the Maheus had beef soup and the beef boiled in it. The fortnight's pay had just fallen on the previous night. They failed to remember such a treat as the present one. Even on last St. Barbe's Day, the miners' holiday, during which they knock off for seventy-two hours, the rabbit had not been so fat or so tender. Hence the ten pairs of jaws, from Estella's, who was getting her teeth, to Daddy Jollycorpse's, who was losing his, set to with such good will that even the bones of the rabbit vanished. It was lovely, was meat, but they digested it badly; they saw too little of it. There only remained a piece of the cold beef from the soup for the evening. Never mind, they would eke it out with slices of bread and butter if they were hungry.

Johnny was the first to get away. Bébert was waiting for him at the other end of the gardens. The two prowled about a long while, trying to lay hold of Lydia, whom La Brulée, having made up her mind not to go out herself, wanted to keep with her. When she found the child had gone she yelled and flung about her bony arms, while Pierron, disgusted with her noise, strolled off very quietly with the air of a man who amuses himself without remorse, knowing that his better half is enjoying herself likewise.

Shortly afterwards Daddy Jollycorpse departed also, and Maheu himself made up his mind to get into the open air, after having asked his wife whether she would join him yonder. No, she could not think of it, it would be too much trouble with all the little ones, perhaps she would be able to manage, she would see about it; she would be sure to find him if she did come. When Maheu got outside he hesitated for a moment, then he went into his neighbor's to see if Levaque was ready. But he found Zachariah there waiting for Philomena, and her mother began to talk about the marriage, shouting that they were leading her by the nose and that she would have a final explanation with Maheu's wife. Philomena having tranquilly finished putting her cap on, Zachariah went away with her, repeating that he was agreeable if his mother was. Levaque had made himself scarce already. Maheu equally referred the woman to his wife and made off as quickly as he could. Bouteloup, who was having a bit of

cheese, with both his elbows squatted on the table, obstinately declined the friendly offer of some beer. He was going to stay at home.

Little by little the village became empty, all the men strolling off by themselves, one behind the other, while the girls, watching in the doorways, started in the opposite direction on the arms of their swains. As her father was turning the corner by the church, Catherine, perceiving Chaval, hastened to join him, and both took the road to Montsou. And the mother, having been left alone amidst the children, had not the courage to rise from her chair, but poured out a second glass of coffee, which she sipped slowly. In a little while the women had the village all to themselves; they were draining the coffee pots, mutually inviting each other round the tables, still warm and greasy with the remains of the dinner.

Maheu guessed that Levaque was at Rasseneur's, and he went slowly down the hill. And, in fact, behind the shop, in the narrow strip of garden shut in by quickset hedges, Levaque was having a game of skittles with some mates. Standing close together, but not playing, Daddy Jollycorpse and old Mouque were watching the balls, so absorbed that they kept their remarks to themselves. A burning sun was vertically beating on their heads; there was only a little bit of shade just close by the house, and Stephen was there sipping his beer at a table, and somewhat annoyed at Souvarine having left him to go up to his room. Nearly every Sunday the engineman shut himself up to read or to write.

"Will you have a game?" asked Levaque of Maheu. But the latter refused. He felt too warm, he was already parching with thirst.

"Rasseneur," called out Stephen, "bring a mug of beer." Then, turning towards Maheu, he added, "You know I stand treat."

But Rasseneur did not seem in a hurry. They had to call out to him thrice, and it was Madame Rasseneur who in the end and in the most polite manner brought some lukewarm beer. The young man had lowered his voice to complain of the bad attendance; they were no doubt kind-hearted folk, who meant well, but their beer was abominable and their soup still more so. He had made up his mind a dozen times to change his boarding-house, but the journey to Montsou frightened him. But one day or other he would look out for a family in the village itself to board and lodge with.

"It would be the best thing for you," said Maheu, in his slow, deliberate voice; "surely you'd be more comfortable with some family."

But they were interrupted by some loud huzzas. Levaque had scored twelve at one stroke. Old Mouque and Jolly-corpse, looking down to the ground, expressed their sense of approbation by a profound silence. The applause of the others found vent in banter, however, especially when the players perceived the jolly face of La Mouquette watching them over the hedge. She had been prowling about for the last hour, and had plucked up courage to draw close when she heard the loud laughter.

"What! all alone?" cried Levaque; "and your sweethearts?"

"I have sent them to grass," the girl answered with a kind of impudent candor. "I'm looking out for a new one."

They all offered themselves, and began to chaff her. She shook her head in refusal, laughing all the while, and putting on a genteel air. Besides, her father stood by, without, however, taking his eyes off the prostrate skittles for an instant.

"Get along with you," resumed Levaque, looking towards Stephen. "We all know whom you are spelling for, lass. But you'll have to take him by force."

Stephen was brightening up also. It was, in fact, after him that the trammer girl came dangling. But his looks said no, though he was secretly amused at her preference. She remained for a few more minutes staring at him with her large eyes, then she slowly turned away, her face becoming very serious all of a sudden, as if oppressed by the heat of the sun.

In a voice scarcely above a whisper, Stephen had resumed the long explanations he was giving to Maheu on the necessity for the miners of Montsou of founding a provident fund.

"Seeing that the company professes to leave us free, what have we to fear?" he repeated. "Of course, it gives its own pensions, but they are granted according to its own liking, because we contribute nothing to them. Well, it would be sensible to establish side by side with the company's 'good pleasure' a mutual benefit society, on which we could depend, at least, in the event of immediate need." And, forthwith, he began giving details, discussed its organization, and offered to take no end of trouble.

"As far as I am concerned I am agreeable," said Maheu at last, with an air of conviction. "But there are the others. try to persuade them."

Levaque had won the game of skittles, which were discarded now for the mugs of beer. But Maheu refused to have a second one. By and by he would, perhaps, but not just

now; the day was young as yet. Suddenly he was bethinking himself of Pierron. Where could he be? No doubt at Lenfant's, another tavern; and he prevailed upon Levaque and Stephen to go with him. The three started for Montsou at the very moment when a new set invaded the skittle alley at Rasseneur's.

On the way thither they felt bound to look in at Casimir's and at "The Progress," both situated on the high paved road. Some mates were hailing them from the open doors; they could not very well refuse. And each time it was a "chope" (a measure containing about a pint); two when they stood treat in their turn. They remained about ten minutes in the place, exchanged about half-a-dozen words, and recommenced a little further on, very steadily, knowing as they did the nature of the beer, and that they might drink any amount of it without it affecting their sobriety. At Lenfant's they met with Pierron who was finishing his second chope, and who, in order not to be unsociable, swallowed a third one. They naturally had theirs. By this time they were four, and they went away to look for Zachariah, who might be at Tison's, another tavern. The room was empty; they ordered a chope while they waited a bit. They then bethought themselves of the St. Éloy, where they fell in with viewer Richomme, who likewise stood a turn. From there they strolled from beershop to beershop without any definite aim, simply to amuse themselves.

"Let's have a look in at the Volcano," suddenly said Levaque, who was getting merry.

The others laughed and hung back for a moment, then went after all, in order not to leave their mates. They were by this time in the thick of the fair. At the lower end of the long and narrow room of the Volcano, on a kind of platform made of rough deal boards, five female performers, the dregs of the Lille streets, were parading their questionable charms, and trolling out their ribald songs with gestures supposed to be attractive. The room was full of trammers of both sexes, pitmen, and even lads of fourteen, the whole of the youth of the pit indulging in gin in preference to beer. Some old miners, those whose households were famed for neither comfort nor decency, were ogling the singers.

When the new comers were seated round a small table, Stephen took possession of Levaque to explain to him his idea of a provident fund. He had all the stubborn ardor of the newly-converted propagandist who creates a mission for himself, as it were.

"Each member could assuredly afford to give twenty sous, per month," he repeated. "With the twenty sous accumulated, one might, in the course of four or five years, get a large capital together, and where there are funds there is strength under no matter what circumstances. Isn't it so? Well, what do you think of it?"

"I don't say nay," answered Levaque, who in reality was paying very little attention, being attracted by an enormous fair woman on the platform. "We'll talk about it." He, in fact, remained behind when Maheu and Pierron, after having drunk their beer, went away without hearing a second song.

Outside Stephen, who had accompanied them, fell in with La Mouquette, who seemed to have kept close at their heels. She continued to stare at Stephen provokingly, laughing good-naturedly enough, but when she perceived that, though inclined to be pleasant and to joke, he would not leave his mates, she turned away with an angry gesture and was lost in the crowd.

"Where is Chaval?" asked Pierron.

"Indeed, where is he?" said Maheu. Then, answering himself, he added, "He is sure to be at Piquette's. Let's go to Piquette's."

But when the three got to Piquette's the noise of a row stopped them at the door. Zachariah was putting his fist under the nose of a Walloon nailer, thick set and phlegmatic, while Chaval, his hands in his pockets, looked on.

"Here he is," quietly said Maheu. "He is with Catherine." For the last five hours the girl with her swain had been walking up and down the fair. Along the Montsou road, this wide street, with its low-fronted, gayly-painted houses, and which sloped down in such a crooked way, there was a continuous stream of people sailing by under the burning sun like a train of ants lost in the bareness of the level plain. The everlasting black mud had dried, and pounded into black dust by the incessant tramping of a thousand feet, ascended in clouds like a hurricane. On both sides of the road, the beershops were full of a surging crowd; their proprietors had set their tables on the pavement, bordered on each side by a rank of itinerant vendors of every thing, open-air bazars, for the purchase of silk handkerchiefs and looking-glasses for the girls, pocket knives and caps for the lads; besides sweetstuffs, cakes, and biscuits. In front of the church there was an archery gallery; opposite the company's yards skittle and bowling alleys. At the corner of the road to Joiselles, next to the counting-houses, there was cock-fighting

going on; the crowd pressed to see the prowess of two red chanticleers armed with iron spurs, and already bleeding profusely. Further on, at Maigrat's, they were playing at bagatelle for aprons and trowsers. Now and then a long silence fell upon the crowd. They were drinking; sousing themselves without a sound. They were mutely guzzling their beer and gorging themselves with fried potatoes in the stifling air, which the frying-pans, with their fumes of boiling fat and oil, made more stifling still. Chaval bought a looking-glass for nineteen sous and a silk handkerchief for three francs for Catherine. At every turn they met with old Mouque and Jollycorpse, who had come to the fair and were so absorbed by the sights as to walk to and fro in absolute silence, keeping side by side, dragging their legs, stiff with age and rheumatism, along in unconscious unison. But the lovers were greatly disgusted at another meeting. They perceived Johnny inciting Bébert and Lydia to steal the bottles of gin from a casual drinking booth installed on the skirt of some waste ground. Catherine could only deal her brother a sound slap, the little girl had already made off with some spoil. Those confounded imps would be sure to end in prison. Finding themselves just then in front of the Truncated Head tavern, Chaval offered to take his sweetheart in there to show a piping match between chaffinches, which had been advertised for the last week on the doors. Fifteen nailers from Marchiennes, each with a dozen cages, had responded to the call, and the little darkened prison houses, with their mutilated occupants sitting motionless therein, were already suspended against a hoarding in the yard of the beershop. The prize fell to the bird which oftenest in the space of an hour would repeat the phrase of his song. Each nailer, slate in hand, stood before his cages, noting, watching his neighbors, and being watched himself. The finches had started, the cocks with their fuller notes, the hens with their trebles, but all very timid at first, only risking a pipe now and then, but gradually working themselves up, accelerating their rhythm until some got so excited at last in the heat of the strife as to drop dead from their perches there and then. The nailers encouraged them, shouted to them in the Walloon dialect to sing, to sing "just another tune," while the spectators, about a hundred in all, remained mute, though very interested, amidst the furious music of a hundred and eighty finches all repeating the same song at their hardest and against time. It was a hen that won the first prize, an iron coffee-pot.

Just then Zachariah and Philomena sauntered in also. They all shook hands and kept together. But suddenly Zachariah turned round furiously upon a nailer, who, out of curiosity, had accompanied his mates, and who was pinching Catherine. The girl, getting very red, told her brother to keep quiet, trembling at the idea of a fight, and of all the nailers falling upon Chaval if the latter objected to his sweetheart being pinched. She had felt the man squeeze against her, but had said nothing for fear of a disturbance. Besides, her swain took the thing very good-naturedly and laughed at it. The four went out, and there seemed an end of the matter. But they had scarcely been at Piquette's a moment, and they were just sipping their chopes, when the nailer reappeared, defiantly jeering at them and putting his face close to theirs. At which Zachariah, feeling himself stung in his family honor, had rushed at the fellow.

"That's my sister, you swine! Wait a moment, I'll teach you to keep your hands off her."

People came between them, while Chaval very calmly repeated, "Leave him alone, Zachariah. I'll settle with him; I'll make mincemeat of him."

Just then Maheu with his company appeared on the spot. He quieted Catherine and Philomena, who were crying. The nailer had slunk away, and the crowd was laughing. To drown this unpleasant episode, Chaval, who was at home at Piquette's, offered chopes to his friends. Stephen was obliged to clink glasses with Catherine; they all drank together, the father, the daughter, and her sweetheart, the son saying politely, "To the health of the company." Pierron also insisted upon standing his turn. The utmost cordiality prevailed, when Zachariah, perceiving his mate, young Mouque, became furious again. He called out to him that they would go "and do for the nailer," as he expressed it.

"I must smash him. You, Chaval, keep Philomena with Catherine. I'll be back soon enough."

Maheu offered treat in his turn. After all, if the lad wished to take his sister's part, it only showed a good example. But Philomena only shrugged her shoulders; the moment she noticed young Mouque she felt very easy about Zachariah's projects of vengeance. The two were merely off to the Volcano.

The pleasures of the fair were generally wound up with an evening at the ball of the Jolly Good Fellow. Widow Désir, its proprietress, was a matron, about fifty, as round as a beer barrel, but so fresh and sprightly as to always have half-a-

dozen admirers dangling after her. "One for every day in the week," she said; "if they liked to come in a crowd on Sundays they might." She called the men of the neighboring mines her children, her tender feeling for them arising, no doubt, from the recollections of the oceans of beer she had dispensed to them. She had other pretensions in the way of having introduced the débutante trammer girls to the select society of the district. The Jolly Good Fellow consisted of two large rooms, the tavern itself with its counter and tables, behind which, communicating with the latter by means of a recess, was the ball-room, a vast hall, with a boarded floor in the middle, the rest being laid with brick. There was some attempt at decoration. Two garlands of paper flowers stretched diagonally across the ceiling, and were relieved in the center by a crown of the same. Along the walls were distributed gilt pasteboard scrolls, bearing the names of the patron saints of the miners and iron puddlers; and, in fact, reciting the whole of the nomenclature of the calendar relating to corporations. The ceiling was so low, however, that the musicians, in their tribune, about as big as an ordinary pulpit, could not stand upright without danger to their occiputs. To shed the required luster on the scene of an evening, four paraffine lamps were suspended in the respective corners of the room.

On that particular Sunday dancing had begun at five o'clock, in broad daylight. But it was only toward seven that the rooms were getting full. Outside the wind had risen, and was blowing the black dust about in blinding clouds, that made people's eyes smart, and finally grizzled in the boiling oil of the fried potato pans. Maheu, Stephen, and Pierron, who had just come in to sit down for a bit, found Chaval dancing with Catherine, while Philomena, all alone, was looking on. Neither Levaque nor Zachariah had reappeared. As there were no seats round the ball-room, Catherine after each dance came to sit at her father's table in the next room. They called out to Philomena, but she said that she preferred to remain standing. It was getting dusk; the three musicians played their hardest; the only thing visible in the room was the undulation of the dancers' hips and chests amidst a confusion of swinging arms. The appearance of the lamps was greeted with loud cheers, and all at once their glare revealed the crimson faces, the disheveled locks sticking to the temples, the flying skirts, sweeping as it were the pungent odor of the many perspiring couples before them. With a smile, Maheu drew Stephen's attention to La Mouquette, who, plump

and shiny like a bladder of lard, was violently whirling round and round on the arm of a tall lank banksman. She was already, apparently, at any rate, consoling herself for Stephen's neglect.

It was full eight o'clock when Mother Maheu made her appearance, having Estella at the breast and followed by her small progeny, Alzira, Henry, and Leonora. She had come straight to the Jolly Good Fellow, making sure of finding her good man there. They would sup later on; no one was hungry as yet, soaked as they were, the women with coffee, the men with beer. Some other women had arrived also, and people were grinning and whispering on seeing trudge behind Mother Maheu, La Levaque, accompanied by Bouteloup, who was leading by the hand Achilles and Desirée, Philomena's two little ones. The two women appeared to be very friendly together, they continually turned round and spoke to one another. There had been a very lengthy explanation on the way. Mother Maheu had suddenly consented to Zachariah's marriage, grieved at having to lose the wages of her eldest, but yielding, nevertheless, because she considered that she could no longer keep them without committing an injustice. Though anxious at heart, she tried to look cheerful, but ever and anon she asked herself how she was going to make both ends meet with this heavy slice of her coming-in departing from her.

"Sit yourself down there, neighbor," she said, pointing to a table next to the one at which Maheu, Stephen, and Pierron were sipping their beer.

"My husband is not with you?" asked La Levaque. The men told her that he would be with them presently. They were squeezing in as tightly as possible, Bouteloup and the little ones so wedged in between the others as to make the two tables look like one. More beer was called for. On perceiving her mother and her own little ones, Philomena had joined the group. She accepted a chair, and appeared pleased to hear that she was going to be married at last; then, when they were inquiring after Zachariah, she said, in her soft voice, "I am waiting for him; he is outside."

Maheu had exchanged a look with his wife. Was it true that she had given her consent? He became very serious, smoking his pipe in silence. He also was thinking about the future, confronted by the ingratitude of the children, who were getting married one by one, leaving their parents to struggle on by themselves.

The dancing went on almost without a break, the final

figure of each quadrille raising clouds of reddish dust; the walls shaking and cracking; a cornet-à-piston blaring out a succession of screeches like a locomotive in distress. When the dancers emerged from the dust they steamed like cart-horses on a winter's day.

"I say," spitefully whispered La Levaque in Mother Maheu's ear, "what about strangling Catherine, as you said you would do?"

For Chaval had just escorted the girl to the family table, and both, standing behind the father, were finishing their beer.

Mother Maheu merely shrugged her shoulders. "One says these things," she replied in the same undertone. "What would be the good after all? Her wages will be lost to us soon enough as it is. But I'll take care they don't get married in a hurry. It would only want this now to make the thing complete. We might as well lie down at once and starve."

The cornet-à-piston was blowing a polka, and while the hubbub recommenced, Maheu softly communicated an idea to his wife. Why not take a lodger—Stephen, for instance—on whom they could depend, and who was just looking out for a boarding-house? They would have room if Zachariah was to leave them, and the money they would lose in one way would be made up to a certain extent in the other. Mother Maheu's face brightened at the notion, which was a good one, and should be arranged as quickly as possible. She beheld threatening hunger staved off once more, and to duly celebrate the revival of her good humor another round of beer was called for.

Stephen, meanwhile, was trying to indoctrinate Pierron by explaining the plan of his provident fund to him. He had got him to promise to subscribe to it, when he was imprudent enough to divulge its real aim. "And in the event of our striking you see at once the usefulness of our fund. We can snap our fingers at the company, for the first money wherewith to resist them will be there. Well, then, it is an understood thing. You belong to it?"

Pierron looked to the ground, changing color at the bare idea of compromising himself. "I'll think it over," he stammered. "Orderly behavior is, after all, the best provident fund."

At that moment Maheu turned round to Stephen and straightway, like the honest soul he was, offered to take him as a lodger. The young man accepted in the same way, being

desirous of living in the village, with the idea of exerting his influence among his fellow-workmen. Every thing was settled, Mother Maheu adding that they would wait until Zachariah was married.

And just then Zachariah came back, accompanied by young Mouque and Levaque. All three had, as it were, the odor of the Volcano upon them, the smell of gin and the pungent scent of musk, which with certain classes of women stands instead of cleanliness. They were very drunk, looking exceedingly pleased with themselves, grinning to and digging each other in the ribs. When he was told of his approaching marriage Zachariah burst out laughing so violently as almost to choke himself. In her dullish way Philomena declared that she preferred to see him laugh to seeing him cry. Bouteloup offered half of his chair to Levaque. And the latter, suddenly becoming very sentimental in presence of the family gathering, ordered "another go" of beer.

"D—— it all, it isn't often we enjoy ourselves like this," he hiccupped.

They staid till ten o'clock. Some more women came to join their husbands and to take them home. The beer of widow Désir had simply changed places until the consumers, blown out with it, were so tightly wedged together as to have no longer any elbow room. A continuous roar of laughter issued from the many mouths stretched open from ear to ear. The place felt like an oven, every one was mopping him or herself, while under the paper garlands dancing went on more furious and fast as the hour of separation drew nigh. Both heat and dust were so intense that the eye failed to pierce through them, which encouraged the youngsters to trip up the trammer girls. When a couple fell, the cornet-à-piston blared louder still, and the mad whirl passed over them, as a cavalry charge passes over the slain on a field of battle.

Some one came to tell Pierron that his little girl was lying asleep outside across the pavement. The child had drunk her share of the stolen bottle of gin, and was tipsy; he had to carry her round his neck, while Johnny and Bébert, more inured to drink, already followed at a distance, thinking it great fun. The incident proved the signal to break up: a great many families were already leaving; the Maheus and the Levaques made up their minds to get home also. Just at that moment Daddy Jollycorpse and old Mouque left Montsou together, like a pair of sleepwalkers, absorbed in their everlasting silence. They all went back together, after having

taken a last look at the fair, where the potato pans were already putting out their fires, where the taverns were drawing their last chopes. It was still stifling hot, there was evidently a storm brewing, but the gayety scarcely slackened until they reached the village, dead tired, footsore, and disbanded. La Pierronne had not returned. Neither the Levaques nor the Maheus felt any appetite for supper; the latter fell asleep over their boiled beef of the morning, while Stephen dragged Chaval off to Rasseneur's.

"I am your man," said Chaval, when his companion had explained the provident fund to him. "Your hand; you are one of the right sort."

Stephen was pretty well on in drink by this time, his eyes flashed. "We shall be all of one mind," he exclaimed. "As for me, I'd give up every thing—women, drink—so that we may get our own. I've got but one idea; to sweep the employers off the face of the earth."

CHAPTER XIV.

STEPHEN BECOMES A LEADER.

TOWARDS the middle of August Stephen took up his quarters with the Maheus, as soon as Zachariah, who was married by this time, had been able to obtain from the company one of the vacant cottages for himself and wife.

During the first days the young man, who replaced the elder brother in every respect, felt a certain embarrassment in the presence of Catherine. He shared Johnny's bed, and in the hourly intimacy of rising or retiring for the night there were many things that might have been awkward but for Stephen himself, who, in spite of the constant temptation inseparable from the situation, never gave the girl cause for complaint. He carefully avoided the slightest familiarity. First of all the parents were there, and, besides, his feeling towards her was made up of a mixture of friendship and pique, in equal degrees, which effectually prevented him from treating her in any other way than he did. Theirs had, therefore, become a life in common—at bedtime, at rising, at meals—without any attempt at privacy, save at the cleansing operations of the afternoon. Catherine retired up stairs

now while the men took their bath below, the one after the other.

And at the end of the first month Stephen and Catherine took scarcely any notice of each other. Habit had, as it were, killed common decency; they thought the whole affair the most natural thing in the world. After all, it was not their fault that they had only one room for the whole lot of them. The only one of whom Stephen complained was Johnny, who would lay across the bed like an interrogation mark inverted. Alzira scarcely breathed; Leonora and Henry never stirred. In the house, wrapped in darkness, no noise was heard but the snoring of Maheu and his wife, puffing as regularly almost as the bellows of a smithy. All things considered, Stephen was more comfortable than at Rasseneur's. The bed was not too hard, its sheets were changed every fortnight. His soup was more savory; he only suffered now and then from the scarcity of meat; but they were all in the same boat. He did not expect a rabbit at each meal for his forty-five francs. They were a great help to the family; they managed to make both ends meet, though there always remained some back debts, and the Maheus showed themselves very grateful to their lodger. His linen was well washed, mended, and had the buttons sewn on; his things were put tidy; in short, he experienced the effects of a woman's cleanliness and care.

It was about this period that Stephen began to get a clearer notion of his own ideas. Up till now his revolt had been merely instinctive amid the fermenting discontent of his fellow-workers. All kinds of questions chased each other confusedly through his brain. Why should one class of men be wretched, why others wealthy? Why should the former be prostrate beneath the heel of the latter, without the hope of ever changing positions? And his first stage towards progress was to become aware of his own ignorance. A secret shame, a hidden mortification began to gnaw at him; he knew nothing; he no longer dared to talk of things that passionately excited him—the equality of men—the equity that prescribed the fair division between them of the world's goods. As a matter of course, he took to reading with that want of method so common among the ignorant who suddenly become science-stricken. He kept up a regular correspondence with Pluchart. He had books sent to him, the ill-digested perusal of which put the finishing stroke to his exaltation; above all, one medical volume, "The Hygiène of the Miner," in which a Belgian doctor described the diseases to

which the collier populations fall victims. In addition to this he devoured treatises dealing with political economy of incomparable technical dryness, anarchistic pamphlets that upset him, back numbers of newspapers which he kept by him afterwards as incontrovertible arguments in discussions that might possibly arise. Souvarine also lent him some tomes, and the one on co-operative societies had filled his brain for a month with dreams of a universal association for mutual exchange, abolishing all money traffic, and basing the whole of the conditions of social life upon labor only. The shame of his ignorance made room for a certain pride, since he began to feel conscious of thinking for himself. During these first months Stephen remained in the state of ecstasy of the neophyte, brimming over with generous indignation against the oppressors, hugging the hope of the approaching triumph of the oppressed. In his indiscriminate reading he had as yet not arrived at laying down a system.

The practical redress of grievances advocated by Rasseneur had in his mind become mixed up with the destructive violence of Souvarine. When he came away from the Good Luck, where he continued to inveigh each evening with them against the company, he walked as it were in a kind of dream; he beheld himself present at the regeneration of humanity, which was being accomplished without the smashing of as much as a pane of glass, without the shedding of as much as a drop of blood. It signified little or nothing to him that the means for bringing about this universal reform remained obscure, they would reveal themselves in good time; for the moment he attempted to think out a programme his head got bewildered. He even showed himself full of moderation, and at the same time thoroughly inconsistent, he often repeated that politics should be altogether banished from the social question. He had picked up the phrase somewhere, and he imagined it to be very effective with the apathetic miners among whom he lived.

At the Maheus they always went to bed half an hour later now. Stephen harped on the same string every evening. His nature, becoming more refined, revolted at the promiscuous herding of the miners' village. Were they then so much cattle to be penned up like this, wedged close amidst the fields, and so close as to be unable to change one's shirt without the whole community looking on? And could it be morally, mentally, physically healthy for men and women, for boys and girls, to be so constantly thrown together?

'You are right enough," answered Maheu, "and if one had

a little more money one might have a little more comfort. No doubt it's very bad to be living so closely packed together. It ends badly in every way."

The topic once started, every one put in a word, while the paraffine of the lamp vitiated the atmosphere already overladen with the smell of fried onion. Assuredly life was not a treat under these conditions. They labored like brutes at a task formerly reserved for galley slaves; they left their skins at it more frequently than was their turn, and after all they could not manage to have a bit of meat of an evening. Yes, they had food, but just enough not to die with hunger, always burdened with debt, and harassed as if they stole their bread. On Sundays they were dead tired, and only too glad to take it out in sleep. Their only pleasure was to get drunk. The birth of a child was even no satisfaction, for when it grew up it only proved a thorn in one's side. No, indeed, there was nothing funny in all this.

Then Mother Maheu took up the thread. "The worst of it is," she said, "that there is no chance of a change. As long as one is young, one always thinks that luck will turn—there is always some hope. But luck never does turn, and one gets disgusted but used to it. I wish harm to nobody, but my blood boils sometimes at the idea of all this injustice."

Then there was a pause; they all blew off steam silently in the vague fretting at their cramped horizon. The only one who stared with wonder was Daddy Jollycorpse, if he happened to be there, for in his time people did not worry themselves like this. Folk were born among the coal, they plied their picks without bothering about aught else, while at present the wind blew from another quarter; the miners were getting ambitious.

"Shouldn't turn your noses up at any thing. A good chope is a good chope. The masters aren't often good for much, but there will always be masters. Isn't it so? No use worrying one's head about these things."

At this Stephen blazed up. What? The workmen hadn't the right to worry about these things. That was just it. Things would change before long, because the workmen did worry about them. In the old man's time the miner lived in the mine like a brute, like a machine to bring the coal down, always down below, both his ears and eyes shut to the outside world. As a matter of course, the rich who ruled him might arrange to buy and to sell him, to feed upon his flesh and blood; the miner wasn't as much as aware of it. But henceforth the miner would wake up below ground, would spread in the soil

like grain, and one fine morning the world would behold him lifting his head in the fields, and bring forth an army of men who would restore justice. Were not all citizens alike since the Revolution? Seeing that they all voted together, why should the workman be the slave of the master who paid him? At present the large companies with their machinery crushed every thing, and there were no longer against them the guarantees of olden times, when all men of the same trade combined to defend themselves. It was on account of this, and from other causes besides, that there would be a crash one day, thanks to education. Why they had only to look round in their own village; the grandfathers could not have signed their names; the fathers did already; and as for the sons, they read and wrote like professors. Yes, things were growing, little by little perhaps, but there would be a capital harvest of men, who were ripening in the sun just then. The moment folk were not nailed, as it were, to one spot in the mere struggle for existence, the moment they could foster the ambition of taking their neighbor's place, why should not they use their limbs in endeavoring to become the stronger?

Maheu, somewhat shaken in his convictions, remained, nevertheless, wanting in confidence.

"The moment one attempts to stir they give him back his pass-book," he said. "The old man is right; the miner will always have the worst of it, without even the hope of a joint of meat now and then by way of reward. No, say what you like, things will always remain the same."

Mother Maheu, who had been silent for some minutes, spoke at last, softly as if waking from a dream.

"And if it were true only what the priests say, that the poor of this world will be rich in the next?"

A loud burst of laughter interrupted her. Even the children shrugged their shoulders. The wind of unbelief, blowing over the land, had made them skeptical also; they still had the secret fear of the bogey of the mine, but they made merry over the empty heavens.

"Don't bother me with your priests," exclaimed Maheu. "If they believed what they say, they would eat less and work more, to keep a good berth for themselves up there. No; dead is dead, and there's an end of us."

Mother Maheu took to crooning frantically, "Ah me! ah deary me!" she murmured. Then letting her hands drop in her lap in despair she wound up with an "Ah, it's true, then; we're all done for."

Every body looked at every body else. Daddy Jollycorpse

pat in his handkerchief. Maheu, whose pipe had gone out, kept it between his teeth nevertheless. Between Henry and Leonora, whose heads had dropped on the table, Alzira sat listening intently. But it was above all Catherine, who with her large, limpid eyes, seemed to be drinking in the words of Stephen when he debated and recited his creed, revealing to them the fairy vision of his social dream. All around them the village was preparing to go to bed; nothing was heard but the cries of some little one or the recriminations of some obstinate tippler holding converse with himself. In the house-room the clock kept ticking its monotonous tick; a moist, refreshing coolness came up from the sanded floor, notwithstanding the stifling heat.

"Some more cobwebs," said the young man. "What do you want with a God and a paradise to be happy? Can't you make your own happiness on earth?"

And strung up to a pitch, he held forth without cessation. The horizon, hidden to them until now, burst through—a rift of light flooded the melancholy existence of these poor people. The perpetual renewal of their wretchedness, the crushing labor, this destiny of the brute which yields its wool and is slaughtered afterwards. All this unhappiness disappeared, swept away by an all-carrying wave of sunshine, and midst this fairy-like revelation justice descended at last from heaven. Since God himself was dead, justice would take His place and insure the happiness of mankind by inaugurating a reign of equality and fraternity. A new social structure sprang up in a day, like as in a dream, an immense city of indescribable splendor, where each citizen lived by his labor, and took his share of the common happiness. The old corrupted world had fallen into dust; a new humanity, purged of its crimes, had fused itself into a people of workers having for its motto: "each one according to his deserts and to his works." And the vision grew larger and more beautiful each day, becoming more seductive in proportion to its becoming more and more impossible.

At first Mother Maheu refused to listen, being stricken with a vague terror. All this was too good to be true; one should not give way to such ideas, for they made life unbearable afterwards, and one would stop at nothing to get the happiness that had been held out. When she saw Maheu brighten up, troubled but convinced, she became very uneasy, and interrupting Stephen, would exclaim:

"Don't you heed him, old boy. Don't let him turn your head with all these stories. Just as if all these gentry folk would ever consent to work like ourselves."

But little by little, the charm acted upon her also. Her imagination became excited, and she ended by listening with a smile, as she crossed the threshold of this enchanted world of hope. It was so sweet to forget, if but for one hour, the sad reality. Living the life of brutes as they did, a stretch of fancy became necessary, and they enjoyed the vision of things that they would never possess. But what excited her most, what made her agree with the young man, was the idea of justice underlying all these promises.

"You are right there," she exclaimed. "When a thing is fair, I'd be killed for it. And it would be but just to enjoy in our turn."

Maheu himself ventured upon shaking off his apathy at such times.

"By all that's good, I am not too well off, but I'd give five francs to see all this come to pass before I die. What a crash it will be, to be sure. Will it be soon, and how will it be managed?"

Stephen tried to answer all his questions. "The old social structure was splitting up on all sides, it could only be a question of some months," he asserted confidently. As for the means of execution he was less explicit. He mixed up what he read, and rushed into explanations with those ignorant people in which he himself got lost. Every system was alternately appealed to, but they were all softened down by the certainty of triumph, by the final kiss of brotherhood that would make an end of all misunderstanding between class and class. No doubt there would be a few obstinate ones among the masters and gentry whom it would be necessary, perhaps, to reduce to reason. And the Maheus seemed to understand; they approved and accepted the most miraculous solutions with the blind faith of the new convert, as did the Christians of the primitive days of the Church, who expected a new society to arise on the corruptions of the old world. Little Alzira caught up some words, and pictured to herself a state of perfect happiness in a well warmed house, where the children were allowed to play as long and to eat as much as they liked. Catherine, without stirring, her chin resting on her hand, did not take her eyes off Stephen, and when he ceased speaking she awoke with a kind of shudder, her face with the color gone out of it, and she herself taken with a sudden chill.

But Mother Maheu looked at the clock. "Gracious me, it's past nine! we ought to be ashamed of ourselves. We'll never be able to get up in the morning."

And the Maheus, sad at heart, almost in despair, broke up for the evening; they felt as if they had been rich, and had suddenly fallen back into their poverty. Daddy Jollycorpse, who went back to his work, averred, growling, that all this talk did not make the soup a bit better, while the others went up stairs to bed, noticing the damp walls and the closeness of the air that stifled them. And when the candle had been blown out, Stephen heard Catherine toss about on her pillow before going to sleep.

Sometimes the neighbors looked in of an evening. Levaque, who got wound up at the ideas of share and share alike; Pierron, who slunk away for prudence sake the moment the company was attacked. Zachariah came also now and then, but he did not care for politics, and preferred going down to Rasseneur's. As for Chaval, he had become Stephen's friend, and improved upon the latter's theories; nothing but blood would satisfy him. Almost every evening he passed an hour with the Maheus, though this assiduous attention was caused by a secret jealousy rather than by any thing else. He felt afraid of Stephen filching Catherine from him. The girl, of whom he had got almost tired, had suddenly become precious to him since Stephen came to lodge in her father's house.

As a matter of course, Stephen's influence spread; he gradually revolutionized the whole of the village. It was a kind of covert propaganda, the more effectual, seeing that he himself grew in his fellow-workers' esteem. Mother Maheu, notwithstanding her mistrusts as a prudent housewife, treated him with consideration, like a young man who paid her punctually, who neither drank nor gambled, who was always bending over a book. She held him up as a scholar to her female gossips, who took advantage of this home-made reputation to charge him with their correspondence. He, as it were, became their business man, and was consulted by every one in the most ticklish cases. Hence, at the beginning of September, he had been able to create his provident fund, which was very precarious as yet, only including the inhabitants of the village. But he soon expected to enlist the miners of all the pits, especially if the company remained passive, and did not put too many spokes in his wheels. He had just been appointed secretary of the association; he even received a trifling salary for keeping the accounts and carrying on the correspondence. It made him feel almost rich, because, though a married miner may be unable to make both ends meet, a single one, of sober habits, and having no encumbrance, may put something by. A slow transformation began to manifest itself with Stephen.

The instinct of variety and of material well-being, dormant during his misery, awoke and made him buy himself a cloth suit. He also bought himself more shapely boots, and all of a sudden he became the leader of the village, the whole of which grouped itself around him. He felt the delights of satisfied pride; he, as it were, intoxicated himself with these proofs of popularity. The idea of being at the head of the others, of wielding command—he, young, and but the other day only an obscure workman—filled him with confidence, enlarged his dream of an approaching revolution in which he would be sure to play a part. His face underwent a change, he became grave, he complacently listened to himself talking, while his growing ambition impelled him to the most radical notions.

Meanwhile autumn came apace, the October chills had thrown their russet tints on the small gardens of the village. Behind the sickly lilacs there were no longer any lovers' meetings; nothing remained but the winter vegetables, the cabbages pearly with rime, the leeks and onions making the winter stocks. The showers fell as of yore on the red brick tiles, ran into the water butts, dripped from the waste pipes, sounding like a torrent. Inside the cottages the fireplaces never grew cold now, heaped as they were with coal, the fumes of which poisoned the close atmosphere. Another season of crushing misery was about to commence.

On one of those first cold October nights, Stephen, feverish with having spoken at length down below, felt restless and could not get to sleep. He had waited till Catherine was in bed before blowing out the candle. She also seemed to court sleep in vain. He could not see her in the dense gloom of the room, but he heard her move, though her movements were so gentle as to be scarcely audible. Dreams of what might have been chased each other through Stephen's excited brain; he felt on the point of getting up, then bethought himself and lay quite still. His eyes remained wide open until the clock below struck eleven, then, with a deep sigh, he dropped off to sleep. "Decidedly honorable friendship was better than illicit love" were the last words he muttered to himself.

CHAPTER XV.

THE STRIKE DECIDED UPON.

"LISTEN," said Mother Maheu to her husband, "as you are going to Montsou for your pay, you had better bring me back a pound of coffee and two pounds of sugar."

Maheu was busy mending his shoe, so as to save the money for the cobbler. "Very well," he said, without looking up.

"You might manage to go to the butcher, also. A piece of veal would not come amiss. It's a long while since we tasted any."

This time he did look up. "You must think that I've got a fortune to receive. The fortnight's pay is too lean with their confounded notion of continually stopping work."

Both kept silent. It was after breakfast, on a Saturday, the 20th October, and the company, on the pretext of its being pay day, had again stopped the output at all the pits on that day. For some time, struck with the panic produced by the growing industrial crisis, and not wishing to increase its stock, the company took advantage of the most trifling pretexts to compel its workmen to be idle.

"You know that Stephen is waiting for you at the Good Luck," Mother Maheu said in another moment. "Take him with you. He is sharper than you, if there should be any bother about the pay."

Maheu nodded approvingly. In the discomfort of a day of enforced idleness, they had breakfasted at noon, and Stephen had gone off to Rasseneur's afterwards. It struck two. Mother Maheu continued:

"You had better hurry a bit, and if those gentlemen are there you might mention about your father. The doctor is on the company's side. He is wrong, the doctor, isn't he, father? You are able to work well enough, aren't you?" This latter sentence to Daddy Jollycorpse, who for the last ten days had been stuck to his chair, his legs stiff with rheumatism. She had to repeat the question, and then the old man growled:

"Sure enough, I am able to work. A man isn't done for because he's got pains in his legs. All this is only so much humbug of their own, so as not to give me my pension of one hundred and eighty francs."

Mother Maheu was thinking of the two francs a day of the old man, which would perhaps be gone, and she uttered a cry of anguish:

"Good Lord! good Lord! we'll all be clemmed to death if this continues."

"When people are dead they're no longer hungry," said Maheu, stolidly.

He knocked some more nails into his shoes and prepared to go. The village of the "Two Hundred and Forty" was only to be paid in the afternoon; the men, therefore, did not hurry themselves. They stopped every now and then, waited for one another while their womankind came or called after them, begging them to "be back immediately." Nay, a good many of the latter charged them with errands on purpose to keep them away from the beershops.

Stephen had gone to Rasseneur's to look for news. During the last few days some disquieting rumors were current. It was said that the company professed itself more and more dissatisfied with the propping. It inflicted its fines broadcast; a conflict seemed inevitable. But this was only the avowed cause of the quarrel, the hidden ones were more complex and serious.

Just as Stephen was coming in, a mate, having a chope on his way back from Montsou, told him that a notice was stuck up in the cashier's office, only he could not make out very well what it was all about. A second came in, then a third, and each told a different tale. It was certain, though, that the company had taken some resolution. The spirit of revolt became louder and louder.

"What say you to it?" asked Stephen of Souvarine, taking a seat at his table, on which the solitary refreshment consisted of a packet of tobacco.

The engine driver seemed in no hurry to answer. He slowly rolled his cigarette.

"I say that it was easy to foresee. They are going to drive you into a corner."

He was the only one with a sufficiently clear intellect to analyze the situation. The company, affected by the crisis, struck by the panic, felt obliged to reduce its expenses if it did not wish to go to the wall. And, as a matter of course, the workmen would have to suffer, to take in another hole in their belts; their pay would be reduced under some pretext or other. The coal remained in the yards; nearly all the factories had stopped work. As the company did not dare to do as much, as, on the contrary, it got frightened at this ruinous dearth produced by the unproductive working of its own plant, it had hit, or tried to hit, a middle course, a strife perhaps, from which the miners would emerge conquered and less paid.

Finally, the company was worried by this provident fund, which became a danger to them in the future. A strike would rid them of it by emptying it at once while it was still so meagerly lined.

Rasseneur had taken a seat by the side of Stephen, and both listened with a look of consternation. They could speak out, there was no one there but Madame Rasseneur seated behind the bar.

"What an idea!" said the landlord. "The company has no interest in a strike and the workmen neither. Would it not be better to come to an understanding?"

This was very sensible; he always pronounced himself for reasonable redress. Nay, more, since the rapidly growing popularity of his former lodger, he carried this system of attainable progress beyond its limits, saying that nothing was gained by wanting every thing at once. In his affected candor of the well-fed individual, thriving both monetarily and physically upon beer, there had arisen a secret jealousy of Stephen, still further aggravated by the partial desertion of his shop, where the pitmen of the Voreux came to drink and to listen less. It not unfrequently happened to him nowadays to take the part of the company, forgetting for the nonce his own spite against it at having been sacked.

"Then you are against the strike?" asked Madame Rasseneur, from her place behind the bar.

And on his energetically answering in the affirmative she told him to hold his tongue.

"You have no more heart than a stone," she said; "let these gentlemen speak."

But Stephen was musing, his eyes fixed on the beer he had ordered. At last he looked up.

"All that our mate tells us looks more likely than not: and we'll have to make up our minds to this strike if the company drives us to it. Pluchart has sent me some very sensible advice on the subject. He is not in favor of a strike, either, for the workman suffers as much from it as the master, without arriving at any thing definite. Only, he sees an excellent opportunity in it to make our men enter into his grand combination. But here is his letter."

In fact, Pluchart, grieved at the suspicion which the idea of the International encountered with the miners of Montsou, hoped to see them adhere to it in a body, if a conflict compelled them to struggle against the company. Notwithstanding his efforts, Stephen had only disposed of very few memberships; besides, he had reserved his influence for the prosperity of his

provident fund, which project had met with a much better reception. But this fund was so poor as yet that it would soon be exhausted, as Souvarine had said, and the men on strike would fatally throw themselves into the labor association so that their brethren of all nations might come to their aid.

"How much have you in hand?" asked Rasseneur.

"Barely three thousand francs," answered Stephen. "And you know that the directors sent for me yesterday. Yes, they were very polite; they repeated that they had no objection to their workmen creating a reserve fund, but I understood well enough that they wanted to have the control of it. Go as it may, we are sure to have a struggle on that subject."

The landlord was marching up and down the room, whistling with an air of contempt. Three thousand francs! What the devil was the good of that? There would not be enough for six days' bread for the lot of them. And if they were depending on foreigners, on people who were living in England, they might as well lie down at once and swallow their own tongues. No, indeed, it was too idiotic, this strike.

And for the first time angry words passed between these three men, who generally ended by understanding each other in their common hatred against capital.

"Look here, what say you to it?" repeated Stephen, turning once more to Souvarine.

The latter, without taking his cigarette from between his lips, replied with his usual contemptuous monosyllables. "Strikes! Rubbish!"

Then amidst the silence which his offensive words had produced, he added gently:

"After all, I do not say nay, if it amuses you; it is sure to ruin some, to kill others, and that's so much gained. But in that slow way, it would want at least a thousand years to renew the world. Why don't you begin by blowing up with a barrel of gunpowder these hulks in which you starve?"

And with his shapely hand he pointed to the Voreux pit, the buildings of which could be seen through the door that had remained ajar. But an unforeseen drama cut him short. Poland, his favorite rabbit, who had ventured outside, bounded into the place, flying from the hailstorm of stones leveled at her by a band of truller boys; and in her fright, her ears hanging limp against her head, her tail switching the air, she ran to Souvarine, hugging his legs, imploring him, scratching against him, to be taken in his lap. When he had settled her on his knees, he protected her with both hands, and fell into the accustomed reverie which the contact of her soft silky coat scarcely ever failed to produce.

Almost immediately afterwards Maheu made his appearance. He would have nothing to drink, notwithstanding the polite persistency of Madame Rasseneur, who sold her beer as if she offered it for nothing. Stephen rose, and both started for Montsou.

On pay days at the company's yards Montsou assumed a festive look as at fair times. From all the villages the men arrived in gangs. The cashier's office being very small they preferred waiting outside; they remained in groups on the pavement, obstructing the roadway by a long line of people, incessantly renewed. Itinerant vendors profited by the occasion, pitching their traveling stalls, in which they displayed every thing, from crockery down to sausages. But the drinking shops fared best, because the miners, while waiting to be paid, exercised their patience before the counters, and returned thither afterwards to wet their wages when they felt them safe in their pockets. And they considered themselves examples of steadiness indeed if they did not wind up the evening at the Volcano.

As Maheu and Stephen elbowed their way through the serried groups, they felt the whole pervaded by a growing exasperation on that day. It was not the ordinary devil-may-care jollity of money received and frittered away in the beer-shop. There was a nervous clenching of fists, violent language was on every one's lips.

"It is true, then?" asked Maheu of Chaval, whom he met in front of Piquette's cookshop. "It's true, then, that they have played us another dirty trick?"

But Chaval only replied with a furious growl, casting a sidelong glance at Stephen. Since the coming into operation of the new tenders, Chaval no longer formed part of the same cutting, and he gradually became bitten with a kind of jealousy against this mate, this new comer, "who took the whole of the village on his shoulders, and the dust of whose feet the whole village licked complacently," as he said. This feeling was still further complicated by a lovers' tiff. He never took Catherine for a walk now without accusing her of being unfaithful to him with Stephen; after which he almost smothered her with his caresses, his savage passion for her getting the upper hand of his unfounded suspicion.

Maheu asked him another question—whether it was the turn of the Voreux pit to be paid? And as he turned his back upon them after an affirmative nod, the two men made up their minds to enter the yards.

The cashier's office was a small square room, divided in two

by a wooden partition, surmounted by a wire grating. On the wooden benches along the walls, five or six miners sat waiting, while the cashier, assisted by a clerk, was paying one of their comrades standing in front of the wicket, cap in hand. Above the left bench a yellow bill was stuck up, looking fresh and moist in contrast with the smoky, grayish plaster of the walls. Ever since the morning there had been an uninterrupted procession of men past it. They came in by twos and by threes, stuck themselves in front of it for a moment or so, then went away without uttering a word, with an involuntary trembling of their shoulders only, as if some one had broken their backs.

Just then two miners stood in front of the notice, a young one with a square brutish head, an old one very thin, looking like an imbecile with old age. Neither of them could read; the young one kept spelling over the letters, the old one gazing stupidly. Many came in like that to have a look without being able to understand,

"Just read it out to us," said Maheu to his companion, not being a first-rate hand at the accomplishment himself.

And Stephen did as he was bidden. It was a notice of the company to the miners of every pit. The latter were apprised that in view of the little care taken in the propping, and being tired of inflicting fines, the company had decided to modify the rate of pay for the hewers. Henceforth it would pay apart for the propping per cubic meter of wood taken down the mine and employed, basing the pay on the quantity necessary, and on the efficiency of the work. The price per truckful of coal would naturally be lowered in the proportion of fifty centimes to forty, always having regard to the nature of the seam and its distance from the landing place. And a sufficiently obscure calculation tried to prove that this decrease of ten centimes would be exactly compensated by the price paid for propping. Finally, the company added, that, wishing to give every one time to convince himself of the advantage presented by this new tariff, it would only come into force on Monday, the 1st December.

"If you were to read a little less loud, you over there!" shouted the cashier. "One can't hear one's own words."

Stephen went on reading to the end without paying the least attention to the remark. His voice shook, and when he had finished they all kept staring at the bill. The young and the old miner still listened, as if they expected to hear something more, then went away, crushed by the blow.

"By all that's holy!" muttered Maheu.

He and his companions sat down, absorbed in their own thoughts, their heads on their breasts, while the procession past the yellow bill continued. They were calculating, and came to the conclusion that the company was adding insult to injury, because the propping would never make up for the ten centimes taken off each truck. They would, at the utmost, get eight centimes back, and the company robbed them of two centimes without reckoning the extra time this very careful propping entailed. That is what the company wanted to get at; it wanted to lower wages, no matter under what pretext. It wanted to effect some saving, and the best way was to take them from the miners' pockets.

Maheu kept on swearing, but very slowly and without much passion. Lifting his head, he simply said, "We are a lot of cowards if we accept this."

The cashier's wicket was free by this time, so he got up to be paid. The principals of the job work went to be paid by themselves. They shared with their men afterwards, which was a saving of time.

"Maheu and mates," he said. "Filonnière vein, cutting number seven."

The clerk looked through the lists, which were drawn up from the workmen's own pass-books, on which the viewers inscribed each day, and for each separate cutting, the number of trucks come up. Then he repeated:

"Maheu and mates, Filonnière vein, cutting number seven. Hundred and thirty-five francs." The cashier put down the money.

"I beg pardon, monsieur," stammered the pitman, almost struck speechless, "aren't you making a mistake?"

He stood quite still, looking at the little bit of money, without taking it up, struck with a kind of chill that went straight to his heart. He certainly expected a bad fortnight, but it could not be so little as that, they must have miscalculated. When he should have remitted their parts to Zachariah. Stephen, and another mate, who had taken Chaval's place, there would scarcely remain fifty francs for himself, his father, Catherine, and Johnny.

"No, no; we aren't making a mistake," said the clerk. "You must take off two Sundays and four off days besides; that leaves you nine days' work."

Maheu was following his calculation, and adding up very slowly to himself. Nine days made him about thirty francs, eighteen to Catherine, and nine to Johnny. As for the old man, he had only three days. Never mind; adding the ninety

francs that came to Zachariah and the two other mates, it made surely more than this.

"And don't forget the fines," wound up the clerk. "Twenty francs fines for defective propping." The pitman could not control a movement of despair. Twenty francs in fines, four off days. At that rate the account was right. And to think that he had brought away as much as a hundred and fifty francs in his fortnight when Daddy Jollycorpse was still at work and before Zachariah was married.

"Look here, are you going to take it or not?" shouted the cashier impatiently. "Don't you see that some one else is waiting. If you don't want it, you'd better say so."

As Maheu was going to take up his money with his large hand all ashake, the clerk stopped him. "Wait a minute, I've got your name down. Toussaint Maheu, isn't it? The secretary-general wishes to see you. You can go in, he is by himself."

Dazed and scarcely conscious of any thing, the pitman found himself in a room with old-fashioned mahogany furniture upholstered in faded Utrecht velvet. And there he stood listening for full five minutes to the secretary, a tall, washed-out looking individual, who kept talking to him from over his papers, without getting up. But the buzzing in his ears prevented him from understanding what was said to him. He had some vague notion that the subject of the speech related to his father, the question of whose retirement was under consideration; to the pension of a hundred and fifty francs that would be granted in reward for his forty years' service in the mine. Then it seemed to him that the Secretary's voice grew more stern. He was being reprimanded; accused of meddling with politics; there was an allusion to his lodger, and to the provident fund; in short, he was advised to leave these fellows alone, he, who was considered as one of the best workmen of the pit. He wanted to protest, and was unable to string a sentence together; he only kept twirling his cap between his fingers, and backed out of the room at last, stammering, "Yes, Mr. Secretary, I can assure you, Mr. Secretary."

Outside, when he rejoined Stephen, who was waiting for him, he broke forth:

"I'm a numbskull coward, I ought to have answered him. No bread to eat, and insults besides. Yes, they have a grudge against you; he told me that the minds of the village were being poisoned. What would he have us do? D—— my eyes! Hold out our backs and say 'Thank you.' After all, it would be the most sensible."

After which he kept silent, both angry and afraid. Stephen looked his blackest. They made their way once more through the groups scattered about. The feeling of exasperation increased, the exasperation of a usually calm population, a rumbling sound of an approaching storm, without violent gestures, but hanging terribly over this heavy, stolid mass. A few who were quick at figures had made their calculations, and the two centimes gained by the company on the propping went from mouth to mouth and excited the calmest. But it was, above all, this disastrous pay day, the revolt of hunger against enforced idleness and vexatious fines. As it was, they had scarcely food enough to keep body and soul together; what would it be if they earned less still? In the beershops anger was at its loudest, and so parched the men's throats that half of their beggarly pittance found its way to the tills. On their homeward way Stephen and Maheu did not exchange a word. When the latter entered the house Mother Maheu, who was alone with the children, noticed at once that he had not brought the things.

"That's very kind of you, indeed," she said. "And my coffee and my sugar, and the meat? A piece of veal would not have ruined you."

He did not answer, choked as he felt by a sensation which he tried to gulp down. But in the heavy face of the man, hardened by the labor of the mine, there was a sudden twitching of despair, large tears welled into his eyes, and coursed down his cheeks in a shower. He had dropped on a chair, he wept like a child, and threw the fifty francs on the table.

"There," he said, "that's what I bring you back. They are the wages of the whole of us."

Mother Maheu looked at Stephen, but seeing him mute and overcome also, she burst out crying. How were they to live for a fortnight with fifty francs for nine people. Her eldest had left them; the old man could no longer stir; assuredly they'd be starved to death, very soon. Alzira, seeing her mother cry, threw herself around her neck; Leonora and Henry sobbed as hard as they dared, and little Estella set up a long yell.

And the same wail of distress rang throughout the village. The men had nearly all come back, and each household broke out in lamentations at the disastrous pay. Doors were thrown open, women appeared on their thresholds, giving tongue to their grief, which seemed, as it were, too great to hold under the lowly roofs of their homes. There was a fine drizzle outside, but no one heeded it; they kept calling out to each other, showing their money in the palms of their hands.

"Look here, that's all they gave my man; they are simply doing as they like with us."

"I haven't enough to pay for my last fortnight's bread."

And so it went on from door to door. Mother Maheu had come out like the others. A group was forming around La Levaque, who bawled harder than the rest, for her husband had not even come back, and she felt that, large or small, the pay would be considerably melted down at the Volcano. Philomena was watching Maheu, so that Zachariah might not get hold of his money. The only one who remained sufficiently calm was La Pierronne, but then her husband always managed, one did not know how, or rather, one knew it too well, to have more work put down on the viewer's pass-book than any other workman. La Brulée thought it cowardly of her son-in-law to allow himself to be thus favored. She was with those who showed their anger; she stood amongst them erect and stiff, her clenched fist threatening Montsou in the distance.

"And to think," she yelled, without naming the Hennebeaus, "that I saw their servant pass this morning in the carriage. Yes, their cook in a coach and pair, going to Marchiennes for their fish, to be sure."

Which announcement was received with loud clamor, and proved the signal for the renewal of all sorts of violent language. This servant girl in a white apron, driven to the market of the neighboring town, in the carriage of her master, aroused a general indignation. When the workmen were starving their employers had fine fish nevertheless. But they would not always have it; the turn of the poor would come. And the ideas sown by Stephen were growing, spreading out, amidst this cry of revolt. It was the impatience at the as yet distant prospect of this promised golden age, the craving to have a share of this happiness, that lay beyond their horizon, as yet closed like the grave. The injustice became too great; they would end by asking for their rights, seeing that even their bread was taken from them. The women, above all, would have liked to storm there and then this ideal stronghold of progress, where there would be no more wretchedness. Night was coming on apace, the drizzle was falling thicker and faster, but they still filled the village with their tears, amidst the discordant cries of their neglected little ones.

That evening, at Rasseneur's, the strike was decided upon. Rasseneur himself no longer opposed it, and Souvarine accepted it as a first step. Stephen summed up the situation in one word: "If the company wanted the strike, they would have it."

CHAPTER XVI.

A SLIP IN THE MINE.

A WEEK went by, and the men continued to work, dull and suspicious, awaiting the struggle.

At the Maheus the coming fortnight promised to be worse than the last. As a matter of course, Mother Maheu fretted, notwithstanding her good sense. One night Catherine had not come home. When she returned next morning she did not go to work. She wept and said it was not her fault; Chaval had locked her up, theatening to thrash her if she attempted to get away. He was becoming mad with jealousy, and wished to prevent her returning altogether, at any rate, while Stephen was there. Mother Maheu, wound up to a pitch, wanted there and then to go to Montsou to slap Chaval's face. She did not do so, but Catherine's day's work was lost nevertheless, and do what she would, the mother could not prevail upon her daughter to break with her lover.

Two days after that there was another upset. On the Monday and Tuesday, Johnny, whom they believed to be quietly working at the pit, went off to the Vandame Forest with Bébert and Lydia. There was no doubt of his being the instigator of the escapade; consequently he received a sound drubbing, applied in public by Mother Maheu, in presence of the terrified youth and infant population of the village. Had the like ever been seen before with children who had done nothing but cost money from their birth, and who ought to bring in something now at any rate? And the cry was, as it were, the recollection of her own bitter infancy, of the hereditary misery that made of each little one of the brood a bread-winner for the future.

On that particular morning, when the men and the girl started for the pit, Mother Maheu sat up in bed and shouted to Johnny, "You dare do it again, you wicked ape, and I'll take every bit of skin off your body."

At Maheu's new cutting the labor was very hard. That part of the Filonnière vein was growing thinner each day, so that the hewers, wedged between the wall and the roof, bruised their very elbows while plying their picks. Besides, the water came in more and more; they were in constant apprehension of being flooded by one of those abrupt torrents that split the rock and carry away the men. The day before, Stephen, while violently driving home his pick, and wrenching

it back again, had received full in the face a spirt of water; but it was only a warning; the cutting got simply more swamped and unhealthy. Besides, he never so much as thought of possible accidents, his daily life had become like that of his comrades, careless of danger. They lived among the coal damp without even feeling its leaden weight on their eyelids, without perceiving the kind of spidery web it left hanging on their lashes. At times, however, when the flame of the lamp, burning lower and lower, grew bluishly pale, there was a passing thought vouchsafed to it. A miner glued his ear to the wall to hear the hissing noise of the gas, which exuded in little air bubbles from the crevices. But the constant fear that hung over them was that of a slip, for beside the insufficiency of the propping, always too hastily slurred over, the rock scarcely held together, soddened as it was with the water suddenly spouting out in enormous jets.

Already twice that day Maheu had been obliged to have the props strengthened. It was half past two; the men were going up. Lying on his side, Stephen was tugging away at a block, when a distant rumbling shook the whole of the mine. "What's this?" he said, leaving his pick wedged into the coal. He was under the impression that the gallery was tumbling about his head.

But Maheu was already sliding down the slope of the cutting, crying out, "Quick, quick! It's a slip!"

All the men went down like lightning, driven by the same brotherly impulse for the safety of their fellows. The flames of their lamps bobbed violently up and down in the dead-like silence that had fallen upon them. They scampered along the traction ways in single file, their backs bent double, as if they were galloping on all fours, and without slackening speed they interrogated each other with a word, and answered as briefly, "Where is it?" "In the cuttings, perhaps." "No; it came from below—from the main haulage gallery, more likely." When they came to the air-shaft, they, as it were, plunged into it, rolled over one another, without paying attention to their bruises.

Johnny, still sore all over with the drubbing he had received, had not absented himself from the pit on that day. He was trotting barefooted behind his train, closing the ventilating doors. At times, when sure of not meeting with a viewer, he got on the hindmost truck, a thing strictly forbidden to him, lest he should fall asleep there. His greatest delight, however, each time the train was shunted to allow of another passing by, was hoisting himself from prop to prop as far as Bébert,

who had charge of it. He crept up on the sly, without his lamp, pinched his playfellow till he was black and blue, invented all kinds of monkey tricks, looking not unlike one with his shock yellow hair, his large ears, his sharp face, lighted up by a pair of small greenish eyes shining in the dark. Viciously precocious, he seemed to have the obscured intellect and the lively adroitness of a human abortion retrograding to its primitive animal condition.

In the afternoon old Mouque brought the boys Bataille, whose turn it was, and as the horse was standing sniffing in the shunting, Johnny, who had slided up to Bébert, asked him, "What's the matter with the old crock that he pulls up at every step? He nearly made me break my legs."

Bébert had no time to answer; he had to keep back Bataille, who was tossing his mane at the approach of the other train. He had recognized from the distance, by the mere smell, his mate Trompette, for whom he had conceived a great friendship since the day when he saw him come down the shaft. It seemed like the gentle pity of an old philosopher, anxious to lighten the trials of a young friend by endeavoring to give him his own patience and resignation. It was very evident to him that because Trompette failed to acclimatize himself he dragged his trucks along without any enthusiasm, his head almost between his fore legs, blinded by the gloom, ever regretting the sunshine. Each time, therefore, that Bataille met him he stretched forth his head, greeting his fellow-worker with a cheerful neigh, and moistening his neck with an encouraging caress.

"D—— it all," swore Bébert, "there they are, at it again." Then, when Trompette was gone, he replied to Johnny's query respecting Bataille.

"Don't you make a mistake; he is sharp enough, that old one. Each time he guesses that there's something in his way, a stone or a hole; he takes great care of himself; he doesn't want his bones broken. But I don't know what he's up to today to be sniffing about that door yonder. He pushes it open and then he remains stock still. Did you notice any thing?"

"No," said Johnny; "only some water. I've got it up to my knees."

The train started again. And the next journey, when he had opened the ventilating door with a push of his head, Bataille again refused to advance, sniffing, puffing, and trembling. But at last he made up his mind, and went straight off without stopping. Johnny, who had to shut the door, remained behind and stooped down to look at the pool in

which he was floundering. Then he lifted his lamp, and noticed that the propping had given with the continuous dropping of the water. Just then a pitman, known in the village by the nickname of Chacot (Stumpy) came along, anxious to go up, his wife being in childbed. He also stopped to examine the stays. And all at once, as the little one was going to take a run to catch up his train, a formidable creaking was heard; the slipping rock had swallowed up the man and the boy.

There was a great silence. Fanned by the sudden draught of the falling rock, dense clouds of dust obscured the traction roads. Blinded, almost choking, the miners rushed in from all parts, from the most distant spots, their lamps bobbing up and down, and but faintly lighting up the mad gallop of the black figures across these enormous holes. When the foremost of them bumped up against the rock, they shouted and called their comrades.

A second gang, come from the furthermost cutting, was on the other side of the mass of rock that obstructed the gallery. It was seen at once that the roof had fallen in for at least a dozen yards. The real damage was by no means serious; but their hearts stopped beating, as it were, when a death rattle was heard to issue from the ruin.

Bébert, leaving his train, ran to the spot, repeating, "Johnny is underneath! Johnny is underneath!"

At the same moment, Maheu tumbled out of the chimney, with Stephen and Zachariah. His grief found vent in a string of oaths. The women, who had come up by this time—Catherine, Lydia, La Mouquette—began to sob and to yell with fright, amidst the terrible confusion, still further increased by the gloom. The men tried to make them hold their tongues; they only screamed the louder at each groan coming from the ruins.

Viewer Richomme arrived also. He felt put out at the absence of M. Négrel and Dansaert from the pit. His ear glued to the wall, as it were, he listened, and ended by saying that these groans were not the groans of a child. A man was there for sure. Then Maheu himself took to calling Johnny. Not as much as a whisper came in answer.

The boy must have been crushed by the blow.

And the groans continued unchanged, only becoming more prolonged. They spoke to the dying man, they asked him his name. The groans were the only answer.

"Look sharp, look sharp!" repeated Richomme, who had already organized the rescue gang. "Look sharp, we'll talk afterwards."

The miners attacked the rock from both sides with pick and shovel. Chaval worked away without saying a word by the side of Maheu and Stephen, while Zachariah superintended the carting away of the wreck. The time for going up had come: they were all very hungry, but no one seemed to mind it while one of their comrades was in peril. Nevertheless, they thought that the village would be getting uneasy at seeing no one come back, and they wanted to send away the women. But neither Catherine, La Mouquette, nor Lydia would stir. They remained nailed to the spot, plying their spades. Seeing which, Levaque undertook to go and tell them of the slip, proposing to treat it as a matter of no consequence, which was already being repaired. It was nearly four o'clock. In less than an hour the men had done the labor of a day; half of the ruins would have been removed already but for fresh masses sliding from the roof. Maheu was working with such a terrible energy that he refused with a motion of his hand the offer of some one to replace him for a moment.

"Gently, gently," said Richomme; "we are getting at them. Take care not to strike on them."

In fact, the groans became more and more distinct. It was by their continuous sound that the workmen were guided, and now they seemed to issue from under their very picks. Suddenly they ceased altogether.

Not a word was spoken by the men. All had felt, as it were, the shadow of death that passed by them in the dense gloom. They simply plied their picks with renewed ardor, drenched with perspiration, their nerves and muscles strained to the highest pitch. Suddenly a foot became visible; they threw down their picks and took up the bowlders with their hands. Little by little the man was taken out. The head had not been damaged. Lamps were lifted up, and the name of "Stumpy" went from mouth to mouth. He felt still warm; his spinal column had been broken by an enormous bowlder.

"Wrap him in a blanket and put him on a truck," ordered the viewer. "Now let's try to get at the little one, and let's look sharp about it."

Maheu had never ceased working. He aimed one terrible stroke with his pick, and made an opening by which they could communicate with the gang carting away on the other side. The latter cried out. They had stumbled upon Johnny, in a dead faint, his two legs broken, but still breathing freely. It was the father who took up the lad in his arms. With his jaw tightly set he could only find an oath now and then to vent his grief, while Catherine and the other women burst out shrieking again.

The removal was quickly organized. Bébert had brought back Bataille; they put him to two trucks. In the first was the body of Stumpy, supported by Stephen; in the second Maheu with Johnny, still motionless, lying across his knees, and covered by a piece of woolen rag, torn down from one of the ventilating doors. They started very slowly. On each truck a lamp shone in the gloom like a red star. Behind came the miners, all those that were not wanted to repair the haulage road, half a hundred of black shadows in a file. Now that the work was over they were dead with fatigue; they dragged themselves, stumbled about in the slush, sad and mournful, like a crowd stricken with an epidemic. It took them about half an hour to get to the bottom of the shaft. There seemed to be no end to this funeral procession underground, winding its way along the galleries that branched off, turned abruptly, and stretched away in weary length.

At the bottom of the shaft, Richomme, who had gone on in front, had given orders for an empty cage to be reserved. Pierron and two other men started the two trucks at once. In the one Maheu remained with his child stretched across his knees, while in the other Stephen was obliged to keep Stumpy's body in his arms, otherwise it would have been too long. Then, when the men had wedged themselves into the top compartment, the cage went up. It took two minutes. The water dripping from the tubbing felt cold; the men looked up, impatient to behold the daylight.

Luckily a boy sent to Doctor Vanderhagen had found the latter at home and had brought him back. Johnny and the dead man were carried to the viewer's room, where, notwithstanding the mild weather, a large fire was burning. They had to remove the buckets of hot water, standing ready for the viewer's foot bath, and two mattresses, on which they laid the man and the child, were stretched out on the floor. Maheu and Stephen were the only two admitted. Outside the women, the workmen, and the children had gathered in groups talking in a low voice. The doctor only cast a glance at Stumpy. That was enough for him, for he said:

"Done for. You may wash him."

Two inspectors undressed him, then began to sponge the body, black with coal dust and the grimy perspiration of hard work.

"His head is all right," the medical man went on, kneeling by Johnny's side; "the chest also. Ah! it's his legs that have been knocked about."

He himself took the boy's clothes off, undid his handker-

chief, his jacket, cut away his trowsers with the gentleness and care of a mother. The poor skeleton-like body, stripped bare, looked thin and elongated, like that of some insect, stained with grimy coal dust, with yellowish soil, here and there relieved by little clots of blood. They were obliged to wash it also, before the injuries could be ascertained. And it seemed to grow thinner still under the moist sponge, its dull pale flesh letting the bones peep through. It was pitiful to behold this last degenerated specimen of a race of wretched beings, this handful of suffering humanity, with the life almost crushed out of it by the falling rock. When he had been washed, the bruises on the thighs stood out plainly in two bloody stains on the dull white skin.

Johnny, recovering from his faint, uttered a groan. Standing at the foot of the mattress, his hands hanging limp by his body, Maheu kept looking at his child, with the big tears coursing down his cheeks.

"Are you his father?" asked the doctor, looking up. "Don't cry, you see he isn't dead. You'd better lend me a hand."

He had at once noticed two simple fractures. But the injuries to the right leg looked more serious. It might perhaps have to come off.

At this moment Engineer Négrel and Dansaert, who had been informed of the accident, arrived, in company with Richomme. The former listened to the story of the disaster as told by the viewer, and looked beside himself with fury. At last he burst out. Always this confounded propping. How many times had he warned them that they would leave their skins there, and still the brutes talked of striking if they were compelled to prop more solidly. The worst was that the company would have to pay now for the damage done. M. Hennebeau would be delighted, Négrel felt sure.

"Who is it?" he asked of Dansaert, silently standing close to the body, which was being wrapped in a sheet.

"Stumpy, one of our best workmen," answered the head viewer. "He has got three children. Poor fellow!"

Meanwhile Dr. Vanderhagen was talking in a low voice to these gentlemen. He asked for Johnny to be immediately conveyed home. It struck six o'clock, it was getting dark, they had better take away the body also. The engineer immediately ordered the horse to be put to the ambulance van, and to bring a stretcher. The child was laid on the latter, while they put the dead man, on his mattress, into the former.

The women were still standing outside talking to the men.

who had staid behind to know all about the accident. When the door of the viewer's room was thrown open, a sudden silence fell upon the groups. And a new procession was formed, as it were, the van in front, the stretcher behind, and the file of men and women bringing up the rear. It mournfully wound its way up the slope to the village. The first November frosts had chilled the immense plain, a slowly gathering gloom wrapped it round like a shroud descending from the leaden and lowering skies.

Stephen advised Maheu to send Catherine on in front to prepare her mother, in order to soften the blow. The father, who followed the stretcher, dumb with grief, acquiesced silently, and the young girl started at a trot, for they were getting very near. But the van, the somber and well-known conveyance, had already been caught sight of. Some of the women, panic-stricken, rushed out of doors, three or four in their anguish of expectation, madly and bareheaded, running toward it. Their number increased as they went, all choking with a deadly fear. Some one had been killed. Who was it? Levaque's story, after having reassured them all, now drove them frantic with terror. It was not one man who had perished, there were at least ten of them whom the van would bring back one by one.

Catherine had found her mother very agitated by some presentiment, and at the first words of the girl, the latter cried, "The father has been killed!"

The young girl protested in vain, and spoke of Johnny. Without attempting to listen, the woman rushed out, and, perceiving the van turning round by the church, she had turned ashen white, her strength failed her. On every door-step, the women, dumbstricken, strained their eyes, while others followed, excitedly watching at whose door the whole would stop.

The conveyance passed, and behind it Mother Maheu perceived her husband walking by the side of the stretcher. And when the latter was deposited at her door, when she saw Johnny alive, though with his legs broken, she underwent so strong and sudden a reaction, that, choking with anger, but not shedding a tear, she shrieked:

"Nothing less; they maim our little ones now! Both legs. Good God! What am I to do with him?"

"Hold your tongue," said Dr. Vanderhagen, who had come up to dress the boy's legs. "Would you have had him left below sooner than that?"

But the mother's anger increased amidst the cries of Alzira

and the other little ones. While helping to get the boy up stairs and handing the doctor every thing he wanted, she cursed her luck, and kept asking whither she was to get the money to feed a lot of cripples? It was not enough that the old man was losing his legs, the young one was to be served the same And thus she went on, while other cries, heart-rending sobs, came from a neighboring cottage, where the wife and children of Stumpy wept on his body. Night had gathered round, the worn-out miners were eating their soup at last in the village wrapped in dead silence, only broken every now and then by these bitter wails.

Three weeks went by, and the danger of amputation was averted. Johnny's legs were saved, though he would limp for life. After an inquiry, the company had granted the munificent gift of fifty francs. They had promised, besides, to find a berth above ground for the little cripple the moment he should be recovered. Meanwhile, all this aggravated the misery of the Maheus, for the father had received such a shock as to have been obliged to take to his bed with a violent fever.

Maheu had gone back to work since the Thursday, and it was now Friday night. On that evening Stephen talked for a long while about the approaching 1st of December, anxious to know whether the company would execute its threat with regard to the propping. They sat up till ten o'clock waiting for Catherine, who was, no doubt, with Chaval. But she did not come in. Mother Maheu furiously bolted the door without saying a word. Stephen was a long while before he could go to sleep. The empty bed, in which Alzira took up so little room, fidgeted him.

The next day Catherine did not come back; and it was only in the afternoon on returning from the pit that they learned that she would henceforth keep house for Chaval. He led her such a life with his abominable suspicions that she made up her mind to put a stop to them. To avoid all reproaches, he had suddenly left the Voreux pit and engaged himself at the Jean-Bart, M. Deneulin's property, whither she went with him as a trammer. They were to continue to live at Piquette's boarding-house at Montsou.

At first Maheu was mad to go and pull the man's nose and to kick the girl all the way back from Montsou to the village. Then, with a shrug of the shoulders, he resigned himself to the inevitable. What was the good? It seemed to be the common lot, and all they might do or say would not prevent their girls from fault if they felt inclined. It was better for him to marry her, but Mother Maheu would not take matters so quietly.

"Did I thrash her when she gadded about with this Chaval?" she shrieked to Stephen, who sat listening to her, very pale and without saying a word. "Well, answer me, you who are a young man of sense. We left her free, because the same thing occurs in every family. I did not run away from my parents; I should have never played the scurvy trick of taking my money to a man who didn't want it. Look here, say what you like, it's disgusting, and it would make one forswear children."

Seeing that Stephen only answered by nods, she went on:

"A girl who went every evening wherever she liked. What more did she want, and why couldn't she wait till I got her married after having helped us a bit to get out of our misery? Isn't it natural enough that your own daughter should help you to it? But that's it; we have been too kind to her, we should have put a stop to her gadding about with him. We gave them an inch and they took an ell."

Alzira nodded her head approvingly, while Henry and Leonora frightened at this sudden outbreak, kept sobbing quietly. Mother Maheu once set going, ran down the list of their misfortunes. Zachariah, whom they were compelled to get married; Jollycorpse, who was there, nailed to his chair, with his legs twisted in all manner of shapes; then Johnny, who would not be able to leave the room for another ten days, his bones scarcely set, and, to crown it all, this good-for-nothing Catherine going off. The whole of the family was going to the devil; breaking up. There only remained the father at the pit. How were they going to live, seven people, without reckoning Estella, on the three francs a day which the husband earned? They had better throw themselves in a lump into the canal.

"It's no use you eating your heart out," said Maheu in a dogged voice. "We are not to the end of our troubles, perhaps."

Stephen, who was fixedly looking at the floor, lifted his head, his eyes stared at some vision of the future, and he muttered:

"It's time; it's high time."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE STRIKE BEGINS.

ON that particular Monday the Hennebeaus had the Grégoires and their daughter Cecily to breakfast. Quite a party had been arranged. After breakfast Paul Négrel was to take the ladies over St. Thomas, a new pit, or, rather, one newly re-opened, with all the latest mechanical improvements. But all this was nothing more than a pretty pretext. This party was the invention of Madame Hennebeau, to hasten the marriage of Paul and Cecily.

And just on that very Monday, at four in the morning, the strike had abruptly broken out. When, on the 1st of December, the company had applied its new tariff and system, the miners had remained calm. At the end of the fortnight, when paid, not one of them had made the slightest objection. The whole of the administrative staff, from the director to the lowest inspector, imagined that the tariff had been accepted. Their surprise on that morning was, therefore, proportionately great on receiving this declaration of war, showing tactics and a power of organization that seemed to indicate an energetic guidance.

At five o'clock Dansaert came personally to awaken M. Hennebeau, and to tell him that not a single man had gone down the Voreux pit. The village of the "Two Hundred and Forty," when he passed through it, was fast asleep, its doors and windows securely locked. And the moment the director had jumped out of bed, his eyes heavy with sleep, he was overwhelmed on every side. Every quarter of an hour messengers ran up; telegrams kept pouring in like a hailstorm. At first he had hoped that the revolt was confined to the Voreux pit, but the news became more serious at each minute. At the Crévecœur and Maron pits the work was stopped; at the Madeleine none but the stablemen had gone down; at the Victoire and Feutry-Cantel, the two best disciplined pits, the men were reduced by a third; at St. Thomas only every one was at his post—its men seemed to have remained outside the movement. Until nine o'clock he dictated telegrams to every body and to every where—to the prefect at Lille, to the members of the company's board, informing the authorities, asking for instructions. He had sent Négrel on a tour of inspection to the neighboring pits in order to have authentic particulars. All at once M. Hennebeau remembered the breakfast, and was

about to send his coachman to the Grégoires to tell them that the party was put off, when a sudden hesitation, a want of resolve, made him waver; him, the man who had just in a few brief phrases prepared his campaign with almost military promptitude. He went up to the dressing-room of Madame Hennebeau, whose maid was just putting the finishing touches to her hair.

"Indeed, they have struck," she said very tranquilly when he had consulted her. "Well, what is that to us? We are not going to stop eating on their account, are we?"

And to all he could say about the breakfast being interrupted, perhaps, about the projected visit to the pit having become impossible, she had a ready answer. Why spoil a breakfast that was already on the fire? And as for the excursion to the pit, if the thing seemed impossible, they might abandon the idea afterwards.

"Besides," she added, when her maid was gone, "you know well enough why I wish to have these good folk here. This marriage ought to concern you much more than all the nonsense of your workmen. And—and I wish it, so there's an end of it, and don't contradict me."

He looked at her, his lips quivering slightly, the features of the stern and resolute disciplinarian showing for a few seconds the secret grief of a broken heart. She had remained seated before the glass, her shoulders bare, in the fully mature, but still resplendent beauty of the woman of forty. For a moment he felt inclined to take her into his arms, but he restrained himself because for the last ten years husband and wife had lived apart.

"Very well, then," he said, leaving the room. "We'll countermand nothing."

M. Hennebeau was born in the Ardennes. His start in life had been difficult, like that of most poor young orphans thrown on their own resources in Paris. After having, by dint of great privations, managed to attend the courses of the Mining Institute, he had at the age of twenty-four obtained the appointment of engineer to the St. Barbe pit, belonging to the Grand Combe Company. Three years afterwards he became divisionary engineer to the Marles pits in the Pas-de-Calais. It was here that he got married, by one of those strokes of fortune which are almost the rule among the mining engineers, to the daughter of a wealthy spinner of Arras. During fifteen years, the married couple inhabited the same small provincial town, without the slightest incident interrupting the monotony of their daily existence, for they had

not even a child born to them. A growing spirit of irritation had estranged Madame Hennebeau from her husband. Brought up in the worship of money, she despised this man who painfully earned his modest salary, and from whom she derived none of the mundane and social satisfactions dreamed of during her school days. He, strictly honest, did not speculate, but stuck to his post like a soldier. The first disagreements had sprung from there, and been aggravated by differences of temper both physical and moral. He worshiped his wife; if she worshiped any one at all, it was some ideal lover, altogether unlike her wedded lord. When the former became a reality, the husband knew nothing of it. At last he made up his mind to leave the provinces, and to accept an administrative post in the capital, thinking that his wife would be grateful to him for at least that much. But Paris still further widened the gulf between them—this Paris for which she had craved while still playing with her doll. In about a week she had purged herself of her provincial ways and manners, and adopted those of the born Parisian fine lady, imitating the latter's elegance, rushing head foremost into all the extravagant follies of the period. The ten years she spent there were marked by a flirtation with a man whose desertion almost killed her. This time the husband was not kept in ignorance, but he resigned himself, going even so far as to accept the appointment at Montsou, in the faint hope that, with the recovery of her health, peace and affection would be restored to his home amidst this black desert.

The contrary almost happened. During the three years that they inhabited Montsou the weariness and irritation of their first marriage life had recommenced. At first Madame Hennebeau had appeared relieved by the profound quietude around her, finding comfort in the unbroken monotony of this immense plain. She shut herself up like a woman who had done with life; she pretended to be heartbroken, so utterly indifferent to every thing that even the prospect of getting stout did not affect her. Then, beneath this indifference, another attack of mundane fever declared itself, a revived craving to return to the world once more, which she endeavored to beguile for six months by organizing and furnishing to her taste the small mansion allotted to the director. She said it was odious to her in its present state, and began to fill it with tapestry and knick-knacks, with sumptuous accessories of all kinds, the fame of which spread as far as Lille. After which her country surroundings exasperated her; this everlasting procession of the beasts of the fields, those never end-

ing black roads, swarming with a horrid population that frightened and disgusted her. Lamentations about being exiled began, she accused her husband of having sacrificed her to this salary of forty thousand francs, a mere pittance, and scarcely sufficient to keep the house going. Why did not he take example by others and demand a part of the profits? Why did not he claim some shares? In short, why did not he try to be a successful man at last? She insisted upon all this with the cruelty of the woman, strong in the consciousness of the marriage portion she had brought. He, ever correct, took refuge in the calm imperturbability of the great administrator, for the love for his wife grew stronger each day, fanned by her contemptuous indifference. He had never inspired her with such a passion as he himself dreamed of. Each morning he hoped that night would bring the desired reconciliation; each evening he quailed before her cold, stern looks, scarcely daring to touch her hand. His sufferings, he knew, admitted of no cure; it was the anguish of a tender and loving heart, hidden beneath a stern exterior, vainly and secretly regretting the happiness it had been unable to find in sympathetic companionship. At the end of six months, when the house was completely furnished and no longer occupied Madame Hennebeau's thoughts, she fell into another relapse of languor and *ennui*, saying that this exile would kill her, and that she was eagerly looking out for death.

Just at that time Paul Négrel came to Montsou. His mother, the widow of a captain in the army, living at Avignon, her husband's birthplace, on the slenderest of incomes, had condemned herself to the greatest privations in order to send her son to the Polytechnic School in Paris. He had passed his examination by the skin of his teeth, and his uncle had offered to take him as engineer to the Voreux pit. From that moment M. Hennebeau treated him like a child of his own, gave him his apartment, allowed him to live there altogether, which enabled Négrel to send half of his salary of three thousand francs to his mother. In order to hide his kindness M. Hennebeau spoke of the trouble it would have been to the young man to make a home of his own in one of the little cottages reserved to each engineer of the pits; besides, he pretended to want the little tenement for an engineer of the central service, who was already living there. Madame Hennebeau at once assumed the rôle of kind and tender aunt, ever ready with sweet counsel in every emergency. Enough; if their relations became of a different kind, it was not from passion on either side. She was not in the least jealous; on the contrary, she

frequently chaffed him about his peccadilloes, which he strenuously denied.

Two years passed like this. The idea of a good match for her protégé constantly preoccupied Madame Hennebeau, and if M. Hennebeau's suspicions were suddenly aroused one night, they were as suddenly lulled to rest next morning by Madame Hennebeau mentioning that she had chosen Cecily Grégoire to be their nephew's wife. And Madame Hennebeau bestirred herself so energetically that her husband was ashamed of his monstrous thoughts. He simply felt very grateful to the young man, because the house was less dull since his arrival.

As he was leaving his wife's dressing-room and coming down the stairs Négrel entered by the front door. The latter looked quite amused at this story of the strike; his eyes beamed, he spoke quite cheerfully.

"Well?" asked his uncle.

"Well; I have made the tour of the villages. They seem quiet enough. But I think they are going to send you a deputation."

But at this moment Madame Hennebeau called out from the first floor, "Is that you, Paul? Just come up and give me some news. How silly of them to turn spiteful; they are so happy as they are."

And the director was obliged to be content with this scant news, seeing that his wife called away his messenger. He went back to his room, where another bundle of telegrams had collected on his writing-table during his absence.

At eleven o'clock, when the Grégoires arrived, they were quite surprised at the unceremonious behavior of the manservant, who had been mounting guard, and who pushed them aside previous to letting them in, in order to cast an uneasy glance at both ends of the road. The drawing-room curtains were not drawn, so they were taken immediately to the business room of M. Hennebeau, who apologized for receiving them in that way; but the drawing-room looked on the road, and it was unnecessary to appear to provoke people.

"Why you don't know, then?" he went on, noticing their wondering looks.

M. Grégoire, when he heard that the men had struck at last, shrugged his shoulders very placidly. It would be nothing at all, the population was essentially honest. Madame Grégoire indorsed her husband's confidence in the traditional resignation of the miner by a mechanical nid-nodding; while Cecily,

very cheerful, and looking brimful of health in her blue walking dress, smiled at the word strike, which reminded her of visits to and the playing of Lady Bountiful in the villages.

There was no time for further conversation, for Madame Hennebeau, dressed in black silk, and followed by Négrel, entered the room.

"Isn't it a nuisance?" she exclaimed, on the very threshold, "just as if they couldn't have waited, these men. You know that Paul refuses to take us to St. Thomas?"

"We'll remain here; the pleasure will be all the greater," said M. Grégoire, obligingly.

Paul had merely bowed to Cecily and her mother.

Noticing this want of gallantry, his aunt drove him with a glance to the side of the young girl, and when she heard them both laugh a beaming maternal smile was their joint reward.

Meanwhile M. Hennebeau finished reading some despatches and writing their answers. They were chatting around him. Madame Hennebeau thought it incumbent to explain that she had never concerned herself about this business room, which had, in fact, kept its faded red paper, its heavy mahogany furniture, its green cardboard case for documents, shabby with constant use.

Three-quarters of an hour went by in small talk; they were going to sit down to breakfast when the footman announced M. Deneulin. The latter, looking excited, entered the room very abruptly, and bowed to Madame Hennebeau.

"You here?" he said, noticing the Grégoires.

And straightway, without any further ceremony, he began talking to the director.

"It's come at last. I was told by my engineer. My men all went down this morning. But it may spread nevertheless. I am by no means easy, and I wanted to know. How do you stand?"

He had come on horseback, and his anxiety betrayed itself in his loud voice and abrupt gestures; which plainly told of the old cavalry officer.

M. Hennebeau began to enlighten him upon the situation, when the footman came in to say that breakfast was ready.

"Stay and breakfast with us; I'll tell you more at dessert," said the director.

"Thank you. I think I will," answered Deneulin, so full of his own concerns that he accepted without further ceremony.

He became conscious, however, of his mistake, for turning to Madame Hennebeau, he apologized. She accepted his apol

ogy in the most delightful manner. When she had called for a seventh cover, she seated her guests—Madame Grégoire and Cecily by the side of her husband; M. Grégoire and M. Deneulin to her right and left, and at last Paul, whom she put between father and daughter. As they were attacking the prawns, and radishes, and olives, she said smiling:

"You'll excuse me; I meant to have had some oysters. On Mondays there is an arrival of them at Marchiennes from Ostend, and I intended to send cook in the carriage, but she was afraid of being stoned on the road."

She was interrupted by a general burst of laughter. They thought it very funny.

"Hush!" said M. Hennebeau, looking vexed and glancing at the windows whence the road could be seen. "Hush! we needn't let all the world know that we have a breakfast party this morning."

"I hope, though, that they will allow us to breakfast," remarked M. Grégoire. "At any rate, they'll not have this slice of sausage."

The laughter recommenced, but more quietly. Each guest made himself at home in this room hung with Flemish tapestry, furnished with old oaken presses and sideboards. The silver flashed behind the glass of the corner cupboards, there was a large chandelier in burnished brass, the convex volutes of which reflected some rare exotics in majolica vases. Outside the December day was glacial with a bitter north-east blast, but not a breath of it penetrated here; the room felt warm like a hothouse, pervaded by the perfume of a pineapple heaped in slices in a crystal dish.

"If we were to draw the curtains?" proposed Négrel, whom the idea of terrifying the Grégoires promised some amusement.

The housemaid who was assisting the man-servant took the thing in earnest, and did as she thought she was bidden, at which the jokes commenced anew. There was no longer a glass or a fork put down without mock precaution; every dish was hailed as something saved from the sack of a town fallen into the hands of the enemy. But beneath this simulated gayety there was a secret fear that betrayed itself by involuntary glances toward the road, as if a band of starving wretches were watching the table from outside. After the scrambled eggs with truffles came a dish of fresh-water trout. The conversation had turned on the industrial crisis, which had grown worse during the last eighteen months.

"It is inevitable," said Deneulin; "the too great prosperity

of the last few years was sure to bring us to this. Remember the enormous capital that was sunk, the railways, the harbors, and all the money swallowed up by the most extravagant speculations. Why, only in this neighborhood, they kept building sugar factories as if the department could yield three crops of beetroot. And, as a matter of course, money has become scarce nowadays. We must wait for people geting back the interest of the millions that were spent; the result of a mortal glut and a final stagnation in business."

M. Hennebeau combated this theory, though he was bound to admit that the years of prosperity had spoiled the workmen.

"When I think," he exclaimed, "that these fellows in our pits were able to make up to six francs a day, double of what they are earning now. And they lived well; their taste became expensive. Of course, to-day it seems hard to them to have to come back to their primitive frugality."

"M. Grégoire, pray take another piece of trout," interrupted Madame Hennebeau. "They are delicious, are they not?"

The director went on.

"But I put it to you; is it our fault? We ourselves are cruelly tried. Since the factories are shutting up one by one we have the devil's own job to get rid of our stock, and now in the face of our ever decreasing demand we are naturally obliged to lower the cost price. That's what the workmen refuse to see."

There was a moment of silence. The servant brought some roast partridges, while the maid began to pour out the Chambertin.

"There is a famine in India," Deneulin replied in a low voice, as if talking to himself. "America, stopping her contracts for cast and other iron, has dealt a heavy blow to our melting furnaces. Every thing is standing still; a distant shock is sufficient to shake people. And the empire that was so proud of this burning fever of industry, as it were."

He put his knife into the wing of his partridge, then went on in a louder voice:

"The worst is, that to reduce the cost price we should logically produce more, else the fall affects the wages of the workman, and he is right in saying that it's he who pays the piper."

The admission, which his candor wrung from him, as it were, gave rise to a discussion. The ladies did not seem to enjoy themselves much. Besides, they were all very busy with their plates, the edge having as yet not been taken off their appetites. The servant, on coming back, looked as if he wished to speak, then hesitated.

"What is it?" asked M. Hennebeau. "If it is a telegram, you may give it to me. I expect some in answer to mine."

"No, monsieur, it's not that; it's Monsieur Dansaert who is here. But he fears to disturb you."

The director apologized and had the head viewer shown in The latter remained standing at a little distance from the table, while they all turned round to look at him, big and panting with the news he brought. The villages were quiet, but it had been decided that a deputation should wait upon M. Hennebeau. It was on its way already, perhaps; at any rate, it would not be long before it arrived.

"That's all right, thank you," said M. Hennebeau. "I shall want a report morning and evening, please."

And when Dansaert was gone, the laughter recommenced at its loudest. They attacked the salade Russe (a salad made of all kinds of vegetables) declaring that they had better hurry, lest they might not be allowed to finish it. But their hilarity knew no bounds, when in answer to Négrel's request for some bread, the maid uttered a "Yes, monsieur," in so low and terror-sticken a tone, that it seemed as if she already felt a band ready for outrage and murder behind her.

"You may speak out," said Madame Hennebeau kindly; "they are not here yet."

The director, who had just received another batch of letters and telegrams, expressed his wish to read one of the former aloud. It came from Pierron, who informed him in the most respectful phraseology that he saw himself obliged to join his comrades for fear of being maltreated; and who added that he had not even been able to refuse forming part of the deputation, though he distinctly blamed the step.

"So much for the liberty of labor," exclaimed M. Hennebeau. And the conversation turned once more on the strike. His opinion was solicited.

"Oh," he said, "we have seen some that were worse than this. There will be a week, a fortnight at the most, of idleness, as there was before. There will be a great deal of lolling about the beershops; then, when they get too hungry, they will go back to the pits."

Deneulin shook his head, saying:

"I am not quite so easy on that score. This time they seem to be better organized. Haven't they got a provident fund?"

"Yes, barely three thousand francs; how far will that go with them? I suspect a certain Stephen to be their leader. He is a capital workman, and I should be very sorry to have to give him back his pass-book, as we had to do to this Rasseneur.

who continues to poison the Voreux pit with his ideas and his beer. In a week half of them will go down again; in a fortnight the whole ten thousand of them will be below."

He seemed convinced, though secretly afraid, face to face with the discipline and calm behavior of the miners. His greatest anxiety proceeded from his possible discredit in the event of the board leaving him the responsibility of the strike. For some time he had instinctively felt to be less in favor. Hence he left the spoonful of salade Russe he had on his plate and began to read once more the despatches received from Paris; replies to his own, and each word of which he tried to fathom. His guests made every allowance for him; the repast began to assume the character of a military breakfast, taken on the battle field, before the first shots are being fired.

The ladies began to mingle in the conversation. Madame Grégoire was the first to express her pity for these poor people, who were going to suffer hunger; and Cecily was already organizing a party to distribute bread through the villages. But Madame Hennebeau professed herself surprised at hearing of the wretchedness of the Montsou miners. Were they not happy, then? People who were lodged, provided with fuel, and medically attended to at the expense of the company? In her indifference to this herd she knew nothing of them but the lesson she had learned by rote, with which she astonished her Parisian visitors. She had ended by believing in its truth, and showed herself proportionately indignant at the ungratefulness of the people.

Meanwhile Négrel had continued to frighten M. Grégoire. He did not dislike Cecily, and felt quite prepared to marry her in order to please his aunt; but, like the worldly-wise young gentleman he fancied himself to be, he showed no love-sick ardor—he was not going to rush at her, as he expressed it. He professed to be a Republican, which did not prevent him ruling his workmen with exceeding severity, or mildly ridiculing them in presence of the ladies.

"I do not share my uncle's optimism," he said. "I am afraid of serious troubles. Therefore, M. Grégoire, I would advise you to securely lock The Piolaine. They might sack it."

Just at that moment M. Grégoire, with a beaming, good-natured face, was paternally indorsing his wife's sentiments with regard to the miners.

"Sack The Piolaine!" he exclaimed, in great astonishment. "And why should they sack The Piolaine?"

"Are you not a shareholder in the Montsou Company? You do nothing. You live by the labor of others. In short, you

are the capital, and that is enough. Be sure that if the social revolution were triumphant it would compel you to give up your fortune, as so much stolen money."

This time M. Grégoire's childish tranquillity, his unquestioning serenity, forsook him. He spluttered, "Stolen money! my fortune? Did not my great grandfather hardly and honestly earn the sum invested by him years ago? Did we not run the risks of the enterprise? Do I make a bad use of my income, now that I've got it?"

Madame Hennebeau, seeing his wife and daughter share his excitement and fear, hastened to interfere, saying, "Don't you see that Paul is merely joking?"

But M. Grégoire felt greatly upset nevertheless. As the servant was handing round some small cray-fish arranged in a pretty pyramid, he took three of them without noticing what he did, and began to crunch the claws with his teeth.

"Besides, I don't say," he continued, "there are not shareholders who abuse their wealth. I have been told of certain Ministers who receive presents out of the dividends of the company for having been useful to it. It is like this grand gentleman, whom I will not name, a duke—our principal shareholder—whose life is a scandal of extravagance, millions and millions thrown away on women, in dissipation, in useless display. But we—we that live without show and without noise, like the honest folk we are; we who do not speculate, who are content to spend what is our own strictly, not forgetting the poor! No, no! your workmen would be famous scoundrels, indeed, to rob us of as much as a pin's head."

Négrel himself was obliged to soothe him, amused as he was at his outburst. The cray-fish were being discussed, there was the sound of crunching every where while the conversation turned on politics. Notwithstanding his scarcely subsided choler, M. Grégoire professed himself a Liberal; he regretted Louis Philippe. As for Deneulin he was for a strong Government. He declared that the Emperor was drifting into concessions that were to be regretted. "Remember '89," he said. "It was the nobility that made the revolution possible by their complicity, by their taste for philosophic novelties. Well, the middle classes are at this moment playing the same idiotic part in their frantic fury for Liberalism, in their rage for destroying every thing, in their obsequious flattery of the people. Yes, yes; depend upon it, you are only sharpening the teeth of the monster so that it may devour us. And devour us it will, be sure of it."

The ladies tried to stop him and to change the conversation

by inquiring after his daughters. He was obliged to talk of them. Lucy was at Marchiennes, practicing her scales with a friend. Jane had just begun the head of an old beggar. But all this was said anyhow; he did not take his eyes off the director, absorbed in the perusal of his despatches and oblivious of the presence of his guests. Behind this flimsy paper he instinctively felt the influence of Paris, the instructions of the board, that would decide the issue of the strike. Hence he came back to the subject of the strike in spite of himself.

"What have you decided to do?" he asked abruptly.

M. Hennebeau started, then replied by something vague:

"We'll see."

"No doubt you are strong, you can afford to wait," said Deneulin, scarcely conscious that he was speaking to any one but himself. "You can afford to wait, but I'll go to the wall if the strike spreads to Vandame. It doesn't signify that I've renewed the plant of the Jean-Bart. I can only manage to keep standing by an incessant output, seeing that it is the only pit I have, and I don't like the look of things, I assure you."

This involuntary confession seemed to strike M. Hennebeau. He was listening, and a whole plan was born then and there in him. In the event of the strike turning out badly, why not take advantage of it to aggravate matters, even to the ruin of neighbor Deneulin, and then buy his concession of him at a song. It was the surest way to regain the favor of the Montsou board, whose dream these many years had been to get possession of Vandame.

"If the Jean-Bart worries you as much as all that, why not dispose of it to us?"

M. Deneulin was already regretting his lamentations.

"Never while I live!" he exclaimed.

The company made merry over his excitement, and at the moment the dessert was brought to table they had managed to drop the strike. An apple charlotte was voted delicious. And the ladies seemed to get their turn of the conversation now. They discussed recipes in reference to the pine-apple, which met with approbation quite as enthusiastic as that bestowed upon the former dish. Cheese, candied fruits, pears, and grapes, ended by putting them in the good humor so necessary to the termination of a copious breakfast. All spoke at once, having become very affectionate and confidential, while the servant filled their glasses with some kind of Rhenish wine, instead of champagne, voted vulgar.

And the projected union of Paul and Cecily certainly advanced a serious step amid this sympathy produced by

the splendid dessert. His aunt had given him such significant glances that the young man could but show himself very amiable, and try to regain by his caressing way the favor of the Grégoires, which had been somewhat jeopardized by his stories of pillage. For a moment M. Hennebeau, confronted with this thorough understanding between his wife and his nephew, had felt his suspicions revive, as if he had surprised something more guilty than counsel in their mutual flashes of secret intelligence. But again the idea of this marriage, planned at this very table, reassured him.

The man-servant was bringing in the coffee when the maid, looking terror-stricken, followed close on his heel.

"Monsieur, monsieur, they are here!"

She was alluding to the delegates. Doors opened and closed; it was as if a breath of fear blew through the walls that divided them from the adjacent rooms.

"Show them into the drawing-room," said M. Hennebeau. Around the table the guests looked at each other with an expression of insuperable fear. The room became silent at once; they wanted to recommence their jokes; they pretended to put the sugar in their pockets; they suggested that the plate should be hidden. But the director remained grave and the laughter died away; the loud voices fell to whispers, while the heavy footsteps of the deputation, which was being shown in, sounded crushing on the carpet of the adjacent drawing-room.

"I hope you'll take your coffee first," said Madame Hennebeau to her husband, lowering her voice.

"No doubt, they can wait."

He felt nervous and pricked up his ears for every sound from the next room, though ostensibly and indifferently toying with his spoon.

Paul had got up with Cecily, and made the young girl put her eye to the keyhole. They were choking with laughter and whispered very low.

"Do you see them?"

"Yes, I see a stout one, with two smaller ones behind him."

"What do you think of their cut-throat faces?"

"I think they are very nice."

Suddenly M. Hennebeau rose from his chair, saying that the coffee was too hot, and that he would take it later on. As he left the room he put his finger to his lips to recommend prudence. They had all seated themselves, and remained round the table, silent, not daring to move, anxiously listening to what was going on between their host and these men with their rough voices.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE MINERS' DEMAND.

AT a meeting held at Rasseneur's on the previous night Stephen and some of his fellow-workmen had chosen the delegates that were to wait upon the director the next morning. When during the evening Mother Maheu found out that her husband was to form part of the deputation she felt very dejected; she asked him whether he wanted them to be turned into the street to allow himself to be thus dragged into this bother. Maheu himself had not accepted without reluctance, and he remained ill at ease, afraid at heart. In spite of their undeserved hardships, both, when the moment for action came, relapsed into the resignation of their race, apprehensive of what to-morrow might bring forth, preferring to bow down submissively. In all matters relating to their every-day existence he generally appealed to his wife's judgment, which, upon the whole, was a sensible one. This time, however, he got angry; the more that he secretly shared her fears.

"Leave me alone," he said to her, getting into bed and turning his back to the wall. "It would be plucky to leave my mates in the lurch, wouldn't it? Besides, I am doing what is right."

She got into bed also. Neither of them spoke. Then after a long silence, she answered:

"You are right; yes, you had better go. But look here, old man, we're done for."

They had their breakfast at noon, because the appointment was for one o'clock at Rasseneur's, whence they would proceed to M. Hennebeau's. They had nothing but some potatoes. As there was only a small scrap of butter left no one touched it. It would do for supper with some slices of bread.

"You know that we count upon you to be our spokesman," Stephen said suddenly to Maheu.

The latter was like one dumb-struck. His words refused to come.

"No, that's too much of a good thing," exclaimed Mother Maheu. "I don't mind him going, but I forbid him to be the bell-wether. Why should he more than any one else?"

Then Stephen began to explain very eloquently. Maheu was the best workman in the pit, the most respected and liked; ever held up as an example for his common-sense. Conse-

quently the miners' claims would, coming from his lips, assume a decisive weight. At first Stephen had been selected to be spokesman, but he was at Montsou too short a time; an older and better man would be listened to with more deference. In short, the men wished to confide their interests to the most worthy; he could not refuse, it would be cowardly.

Mother Maheu could not restrain a movement of despair. "Go, go, my lad; go and pull the chestnuts out of the fire for the others. You have my leave, after all."

"But I'll never be able to," stammered Maheu; "I'd only make an ass of myself."

Stephen, pleased at having prevailed upon him, tapped him on the shoulder.

"You'll say what you feel, and it will do very well."

His mouth full of food, Daddy Jollycorpse, the swelling of whose legs was abating, listened, shaking his head all the while. There was a momentary silence. When they had potatoes, the children gorged themselves with them and kept quiet. Then, after having cleared his mouth, the old man muttered slowly:

"You may say what you like, and it will be as if you hadn't said any thing at all. I've seen a lot of that sort of thing in my time. Forty years ago they drove us out of the director's house, and with the flat of the sword. To-day they may receive you, but you'll get no more answer out of them than out of this wall. Why not? They've got the brass and they don't care a straw."

They kept silent once more. Maheu and Stephen wiped their mouths and got up. They did not exchange another word, and left the family sitting sad and mute before the empty plates. On their way they took Levaque and Pierron; then they all went to Rasseneur's, where the delegates of the neighboring villages were arriving group by group. When the twenty members of the deputation were all come, the conditions to be opposed to those of the company were settled, and they started for Montsou. A sharp north-easter swept the paved high road. It struck two o'clock when they reached the director's house.

To start with, the servant left them in the courtyard and closed the house door upon them; when he came back he showed them into the drawing-room and drew aside the curtains.

The softened daylight, filtering through the lace curtains, fell into the room. And the miners, all very neat and clean, dressed in their best, shaved that very morning, their yellow-

ish hair and mustaches trimmed, felt, when left to themselves, awkward and afraid to sit down. They kept fidgeting with their caps, casting sheepish glances at the furniture—a kind of mixture of all styles, which the mania for bric-a-brac had brought into fashion. There was Henry II. armchairs, Louis XV. stools, an Italian cabinet of the sixteenth century, a Spanish sideboard of the fourteenth; the mantelshelf was draped with an altar-cloth, and the doors ornamented, in the guise of hangings, with embroidered copes. Their feet stuck, as it were, to the pile of the soft Persian carpets. But what made them the most uncomfortable was the heat, the genial and equal temperature of a patent stove system which almost choked them, coming as they did from outside, their cheeks smarting, their hands benumbed with the bitter blast that blew on the road. Five minutes went by, and their embarrassment increased amid the unwonted surroundings of this richly-furnished, and, to them, overheated apartment.

At last M. Hennebeau made his appearance, buttoned up to the chin in his military-looking frock coat, on the left breast of which was displayed the small crimson rosette of an officer of the Legion of Honor. He was the first to speak:

"Here you are, then! You have made up your mind to revolt against us, it appears." And he interrupted himself, to add in a stiffly polite tone:

"Sit down. I am very willing to talk to you."

The miners turned round, looking for the least magnificent seats. Some of them ventured into the easy chairs, while the others, afraid of the embroidery and silks, remained standing.

Then there was a moment of silence. M. Hennebeau, who had pulled his chair to the fire, took particular stock of each man, tried to remember his face and his name. He had recognized Pierron, keeping prudently in the background, and his eyes fell at last upon Stephen, seated opposite him.

"Well," he began, "what have you to say to me?"

He fully expected Stephen to take up the challenge, and was so surprised at seeing Maheu get up instead, that he could not conceal his astonishment.

"What! it's you, a capital workman who has always shown himself so reasonable; you, one of the oldest hands of Montsou, whose family went down the pit to give the first strokes of the pick. Ah, that's wrong; I am sorry to see you at the head of the malcontents."

Maheu waited with downcast eyes until he had finished. Then he began, his voice very low and shaky at first:

"Mr. Director, it's just because I am a quiet and orderly

man, whom no one has a word to say against, that my mates have chosen me. That will prove to you that we are not a set of brawlers, or a hot-headed lot trying to make a disturbance. We only ask for what is fair, we are tired of being starved to death, and it seems to us that it is time to arrange for our having at least bread every day of the week."

His voice grew firmer; he lifted his eyes and looked straight at the director; then he continued:

"You know well enough that we can not accept your new system. We are being told that we scamp the propping. It is true we do not spend the necessary time on it. But if we did our day's work would be still less, and as it is already not enough to keep us in food, there would be an end of every thing. It would be the last blow that would kill all your workmen. Pay us a little more and we will prop more carefully; we will spend the time necessary on it, instead of grudging every minute we are away from the coal, which is the only work that pays. No other arrangement is possible; the work to be done must be paid for. And what have you proposed instead? Something of which we can make neither head nor tail. You reduce the price of the truck-load; then you pretend to make up for it by paying apart for the propping. If it were true we'd be none the less taken in, because the propping would always take us more time than the bringing down of the coal. But what makes the thing worse to us is that it is not even true. The company does not make up for any thing; it simply puts two centimes in its pockets. That's what it does."

"Yes, that's it, that's it," muttered the other delegates, noticing an angry gesture on M. Hennebeau's part, as if to interrupt Maheu.

But the latter gave him no chance. He was wound up, and the words came without an effort. Every now and then he listened to himself with surprise, as if some stranger was talking from within. These were things that he had saved within his own breast, things which he even did not know to be there, and which came from his very heart, ready to burst. He spoke of their common misery, of their hard work, of their living like brutes, their wives and children crying for bread. He spoke of the latter pay-days, of the fortnight's wages eaten into, nay, almost reduced to nothing, by fines and enforced stopping of work; wages taken to their homes amid tears. Did they want to kill them outright?

"Therefore, Monsieur the Director," he concluded, "we have come to tell you that death for death, we prefer to die

doing nothing. It will, at any rate, be so much fatigue saved. We have left the pits, we shall not go down them again unless the company accepts our terms. It wants to lower the price of the truck-load, and to pay for the propping apart. Well, we wish things to remain as they were, and require five centimes more per truck. And now it remains to be seen whether you are on the side of justice and labor."

Some of the miners exclaimed, "That's it. He has told you our meaning. We only ask for what is fair."

Others, without speaking, approved by energetically nodding their heads. The magnificent apartment, with its gilding, its embroideries, its litter of bric-a-brac, had disappeared. They felt no longer even the carpet, the heavy pile of which they crushed beneath their clumsy boots."

"Will you let me have a word?" exclaimed M. Hennebeau, who was getting angry. "First of all, it is not true that the company is gaining two centimes per truck-load by the new system. Let us examine the figures if you please."

A somewhat confused discussion ensued. The director, in order to divide the men against each other, interpellated Pierron, who, however, slunk behind the others and merely stammered a few incoherent sentences. On the other hand, Levaque proved most aggressive, muddling things and boldly asserting facts of which he knew nothing. The heavy sound of the voices was lost, as it were, in the draperies of the room, in the hothouse-like atmosphere.

"If you talk all at once," said M. Hennebeau, "we'll never understand each other."

He had recovered his composure, his rough-hewn politeness, without any acrimony in it; he had become the simple manager who had received instructions and who meant to act up to them. From the very beginning of the interview he had not taken his eyes off Stephen; he did all he could to draw the young man out. Accordingly, dropping the discussion of the two centimes, he abruptly shifted the question.

"You had better come out with it at once; you are simply obeying some detestable instructions, inciting you to revolt. It is a pestilence that nowadays attacks the working man, corrupting the best. No, I do not want any one to tell me; I see well enough that you are altered, you, who up till now were so quiet. They promised you more butter than bread, isn't it so? They told you that your turn had come to act the masters. I'll wager that you are already being enrolled in this Internationale, this army of brigands who dream of the overthrow of society."

This time Stephen interrupted him.

"You are mistaken, Monsieur the Director. Up till now there is not a single miner of Montsou who has adhered to it. But if driven to it, it is probable that all the pits will enrol themselves. It depends upon the company."

From that moment the struggle continued between him and M. Hennebeau as if the others had been no longer present.

"The company is a very providence to its miners; you are wrong to threaten it," M. Hennebeau said. "Why, not later than this year it has spent three hundred thousand francs in having villages built, which do not yield two per cent. interest. I say nothing of the pensions it grants, of the coal it gives, of the medical attendance and medicine. You, who appear to be very intelligent, who have become one of our best workmen in a few months, would not you do better to propagate these truths than to waste your time in associating with people who are not good for much? Yes, I am alluding to Rasseneur, whom we had to discharge to keep our miners from being infected by his Socialist dirt. You are always at his place, and he has, no doubt, egged you on to create this provident fund which we would willingly tolerate if it were merely a savings bank, but which we feel to be a standing menace against us, a reserve fund to defray the cost of war. And while on the subject, I may as well state at once that the company means to exercise some control on this fund."

Stephen let him run on, his eyes fixed on his, his lips only moving now and then with a slight quiver. He merely smiled at this last phrase, and replied very quietly:

"This, then, is a new condition, which Monsieur the Director had not mentioned as yet. Our wish, unfortunately is, that the company should concern itself less with us, and that instead of playing the part of providence, it should simply show itself just by giving us our own, our earnings, which at present it divides among the shareholders. Is it honest, I ask you, to let, at each crisis, the workman starve in order to save the dividends? Monsieur the Director may say what he likes, the new system is nothing but a reduction of wages in disguise, and that's what revolts us; for if the company has to retrench, it acts very badly in effecting this retrenchment solely at the cost of the workman."

"That's it," exclaimed M. Hennebeau. "I expected this charge of starving the people, of living upon the sweat of their brow. How can you talk such nonsense! you who ought to know the enormous risk of all capital invested in every branch of industry, in mining operations in particular?

A properly equipped pit costs from fifteen hundred thousand francs to two millions nowadays. What about the difficulties of getting even a moderate interest on such a sum? Nearly half of the mining companies in France are bankrupt. Besides, it is stupid to accuse those who manage to keep open of cruelty. When their workmen suffer, they themselves suffer. Do you imagine that the company has not as much to lose as you have by the present crisis? It can not control wages, it must be guided by competition on the penalty of going to ruin. You should blame the facts that are, not the company. But it's no good talking to you; you do not wish to be told, you do not wish to understand."

"Yes," said the young man, "we understand very well that improvement is impossible as long as things are in their present state, and it is just for this reason that one day or other the workmen will end by trying to make them go differently."

The words, modest enough in substance, were spoken in a low voice, but with such conviction as to make it shake with suppressed menace. It caused a great silence throughout the room. A sudden embarrassment and undefined dread fell upon them all. The delegates, who but vaguely understood, felt nevertheless that their spokesman had just claimed a share of this luxury surrounding them. They looked once more at the gorgeous hangings, at the comfortable seats, on all the display of wealth, the smallest item of which would have paid for their soup for a month.

At last M. Hennebeau, who had been lost in thought, got up as a hint for them to go. They all followed his example. Stephen had slightly nudged Maheu with his elbow, and the latter, whose tongue was already cleaving to his palate again, said awkwardly:

"Then, monsieur, this is all you have to say to us? We are to tell the others that you refuse to listen to us?"

"I, my good fellow?" exclaimed the director. "But I do not refuse any thing. I am a servant like yourself. I have no more authority than the smallest of your truller-boys. I have my orders, and it is my duty to see that they are faithfully carried out. I have told you what I thought it was right to tell you, but it is not for me to decide. You have submitted your claims to me; I will transmit them to the board, and I will acquaint you with their answer."

He spoke in the calm correct tone of the superior official avoiding the least semblance of private motive in the question at issue, with the passionless affability of a simple instrument

of authority. But this time the miners looked at him mistrustfully, asking themselves whence he came, what interest he could have to tell them a falsehood, and how much he might gain by placing himself between themselves and the real masters? An intriguing adventurer perhaps; a man who received wages like a workman, as he himself said, and could live in such style.

Stephen ventured to interfere once more.

"Just please to consider, Monsieur the Director, what a pity it is that we can not plead our cause personally. We would explain many things, we would advance reasons which must necessarily escape you, if we only knew to whom to address ourselves."

M. Hennebeau kept perfectly cool. He even smiled. "If you have no confidence in me the matter becomes more complicated still. In that case you must address yourself further afield."

The delegates had watched the sweeping motion of his hand pointing to one of the windows of the drawing-room. Further afield meant Paris, no doubt. But they were not quite certain. To them "further afield" meant a distant country, awe-inspiring, inaccessible, hedged round by an almost religious grandeur, where sat throned the unknown divinity, in a crouching, threatening attitude on his altar. They would never see it, they merely felt its power crushing from afar the ten thousand pitmen of Montsou. And when the director spoke, it was this power that was behind him, hidden, and pronouncing a verdict as it were.

They stood crestfallen. Even Stephen made a motion telling them that it was better to go, while M. Hennebeau familiarly laid his hand on Maheu's shoulder and asked about Johnny.

"A severe lesson, assuredly; and it is you who defends bad propping. You had better think it all over again, and you'll understand that a strike will be a disaster to every one. Before a week is over your heads, you'll be starving, for what else can you do? Besides, I depend upon your common-sense, and I am convinced that you'll go down on Monday, if not before."

They left the drawing-room, trooping out like a herd of cattle, their shoulders up to their ears, without uttering a word of reply to this prophecy of submission. The director, who accompanied them to the door, was obliged to sum up the interview himself; the company on one side with its new tariff; the workmen on the other with their demand for an

increase of five centimes per truck-load. All he could do was to promise a prompt reply of the managing board, but in order not to leave them any illusions he warned them that their conditions would be rejected.

"You had better consider before doing any thing rash," he repeated, feeling rather uneasy at their silence.

In the hall Pierron almost bowed down to the ground, while Levaque pretended to put his cap on. Maheu was trying to say a parting word, when Stephen nudged him once more with his elbow. And they took their departure amidst a silence that boded no good. The door closed upon them by itself with a bang.

When M. Hennebeau went back to the dining-room he found his guests sitting motionless and silent before their coffee and liqueurs. In a few words he informed Deneulin of the situation, and the latter's face assumed a still deeper gloom. Then, while he was sipping his coffee, that had grown cold, they tried to change the conversation to some other subject. But the Grégoires themselves came back to the strike and expressed themselves surprised at there being no law which forbade working men to abandon their labor. Paul tried to reassure Cecily by telling her that the gendarmerie had been sent for.

At last Madame Hennebeau called the servant.

"Hippolyte," she said, "just open the windows before we go into the drawing-room. Just let some fresh air into it."

CHAPTER XIX.

TRIALS OF THE STRIKE.

A FORTNIGHT went by, and on the Monday of the third week the time-sheets sent in to the director showed a still further increase in the number of workmen gone down. On that morning a resumption of work had been confidently expected. But the obstinacy of the board of management exasperated the miners. It was no longer the Voreux, Crévecœur, Miron, and Madeleine pits that were standing still; there was scarcely a fourth of the men at the Victoire and Feutry-Cantel, while St. Thomas itself was catching the contagion. The strike was in a fair way of becoming general.

At the Voreux pit a heavy silence had settled upon the inclosure. It was the death-like void of the great factory, the solitude of the industrial center, wrapped in a deep sleep. Under the leaden, lowering December sky, along the high gangways, two or three forgotten trucks increased the mute sadness of every thing around. Below, between the tall, lank uprights of the settle-boards, the stock of coal was getting less and less and already showed the black, bare soil underneath, while the stacks of propping lay rotting under the frequent showers. At the landing place of the canal a half charged lighter lay in a state of torpor in the muddy water, and on the deserted mound of shale, the smoldering sulphur of which emitted its smoke in spite of the dripping rain, a cart uplifted its empty shafts as if in despair. The buildings themselves seemed to have been struck with mortal paralysis; the sifting shed, with its closed lattice shutters; the shaft top, whence no longer uprose the roar of the landing staiths; the boiler-room, gloomy and cold; the towering chimney, too large for the rare puffs of smoke that issued from it. Steam was only got up of a morning for the pumping engine; the stablemen went down with the horses' fodder; the viewers alone remained below, working at their old trade of hewers, looking to the traction-ways that are apt to get damaged when not used for traffic and mended regularly. Then, from the hour of nine, the rest of the business was done by means of ladders. And amidst this death-like torpor of the buildings, wrapped in their shroud of black dust, there was nothing heard but the dull thud of the pumping engine, with its thick and long-drawn breath; it was the last sign of life of the pit, threatened with destruction by the water if the breathing ceased.

Opposite, on the table land, the village of the "Two Hundred and Forty" seemed dead also. The prefect of Lille had come, the gendarmes had scoured the roads, but confronted with the peaceful attitude of the miners, they were obliged to withdraw. Never had the village given so splendid an example to the vast plain. The men, in order to keep away from the beershop, slept the whole day; the women, docked in their rations of coffee, became less quarrelsome, more sensible and quiet, and even the children seemed to understand, for they ran about barefooted and whacked each other without noise. The pass-word, repeated from mouth to mouth, was "Let us be reasonable."

There was, nevertheless, a constant coming and going at the Maheus. Stephen, by virtue of his secretaryship, had distributed the three thousand francs of the providence fund

among the most necessitous families; he had also received a few hundred francs, the proceeds of subscriptions and collections. But now all their resources seemed exhausted; the miners had no more money to keep up the strike, the wolf was at their doors, threateningly showing his teeth. Maigrat, after having promised credit for a fortnight, had suddenly changed his mind at the end of a week, and stopped the supplies, refusing even bread. As a rule, he took his instructions from the company; perhaps the latter wished to have done with the thing as quickly as possible by starving the villages into submission. Besides he played the capricious tyrant, giving or refusing food according to the attractiveness of the ambassadress sent by the parents. To the Maheus he had closed his door without appeal, as if to punish them for not having sent Catherine to him. For the last week, then, they had been living upon the money distributed. But now that the cash-box of the fund was empty, how were they to get bread? To make things worse, a severe frost had set in, the women saw the stock of coal grow less, and were worried by the thought that it would not be renewed at the pit's mouth while the men did not go down. Then they would not only be dying with hunger, they would be frozen to death besides. At the Maheus they were already short of every thing. The Levaques still managed to drag along, thanks to a piece of twenty francs lent by Bouteloup. As for the Pierrons they were all right, but in order to appear as badly off as the rest, lest the latter should try to borrow, they went on trust at Maigrat's who would have given the whole of his shop to La Pierronne, if she had only asked for it. Since last Saturday many families had gone to bed supperless. But though confronted with the terrible days about to commence for them, no one complained; all obeyed the pass-word given to them with unobtrusive fortitude. In spite of every thing there reigned an absolute confidence around Stephen, a religious faith, the blind submission of a people of believers. Since he had told them that an era of justice was at hand they were ready to suffer in the struggle for universal happiness. Hunger turned their heads, as it were. Never had the hitherto closed horizon offered a more boundless vision of happiness to these poor fanatics, exalted by their hardships. When their eyes grew dim from weakness, they beheld the ideal city of their dreams, but close at hand and real this time, with its brotherhood of workers, its golden age of labor, and the daily repast partaken of in common by all. Nothing shook their conviction as to their entering upon this city at last. The fund was exhausted, the com-

pany would not give in, every day would aggravate their situation, and still they did not give up hope. They smiled contemptuously at existing facts. When the very ground should open at their feet to swallow them up, even then some miracle would happen to save them from destruction. This faith replaced food, and kept them warm. When the Maheus and others had too quickly digested their watery soup, they fell, as it were, into a semi-trance; it was like the certainty of a better life which made the martyrs of old throw themselves into the lion's den.

Henceforth Stephen was their unquestioned leader. In the conversations that took place each evening he became an oracle in proportion to his studies refining his inner man. He was constantly reading; he received a great number of letters; he had even subscribed to the *Proletaire*, a socialistic sheet published in Belgium; and this paper, the first of its kind that ever entered the village, had gained him, on the part of his fellow-workmen, an extraordinary consideration. His growing popularity intoxicated him, wrapped him in a state of delightful ecstasy. To carry on an extensive correspondence, to emit his views on the working man's condition to the four corners of the province, to grant interviews to all the miners of the Voreux pit; above all, to become a center, to feel a whole world moving about at his inspiration, was a constant source of pride to him, the former engine-driver, the pitman with the hard and grimy hands. He ascended one rung of the ladder; he entered, as it were, into this hated middle class with a gratified sense of intellectual and social progress attained, which he dared not avow to himself. One thing continued to worry him, the consciousness of his want of education, of his shortcomings in that respect, which made him timid and awkward the moment he found himself face to face with a man dressed in broadcloth. True, he continued to educate himself, devouring every thing, but want of method retarded the result; a kind of confusion produced itself, which ended in a superficial knowledge of many things that he could by no means understand. Hence, every now and then, when his common-sense gained the upper hand, he felt misgivings as to his mission, he had doubts as to his fitness for the task; perhaps it wanted a lawyer, a scientific man capable of acting and speaking, without exposing himself to the risk of compromising his comrades. But a self revolt never failed to restore his equilibrium. No, no lawyers; they were but a lot of scoundrels profiting by their knowledge to fatten upon the people. Let come what may, the working man ought to look

after his own concerns. And his dream of becoming a popular leader got the upper hand once more; he beheld Montsou at his feet, Paris in a distant mist. Who knew? Why not a seat in Parliament one day; the tribune of a gorgeously decorated hall, where he pictured himself fulminating against the masters, in the first speech ever pronounced by a working man in the French Legislature.

For the last few days Stephen had become perplexed. Pluchart wrote letter upon letter, offering to come to Montsou to keep the miners' ardor up to the boiling point. They would have to organize a private meeting at which the engine-wright would preside. Hidden beneath this project was the idea to use the strike as a means of winning over to the Internationale the miners who up till now had shown themselves mistrustful of it. Stephen feared a disturbance; nevertheless, he would have allowed Pluchart to come if Rasseneur had not violently blamed all such intervention. Notwithstanding his power, the young man owed some consideration to the tavern-keeper, whose services were prior to his own, and who counted a faithful band of followers among his customers. Consequently he hesitated, not knowing which course to adopt.

On that very Monday, at about four o'clock, there came another letter from Lille, just when Stephen was alone with Mother Maheu in the house-room. Maheu, out of gear at being idle, had gone fishing; if he had the luck to catch any thing like a fish below the canal lock, he would sell it, and it would buy some bread. Old Jollycorpse and Johnny had gone out to give their newly-mended legs a trial trot; while the children were on the mound of shale with Alzira, who passed hours and hours there gathering slag. Crouching over the miserable fire, which she scarcely dared to poke, was Mother Maheu, with Estella at the breast.

When the young man folded the letter up again she asked, "Any good news? are they going to send us some money?" Stephen shook his head, and she went on:

"I don't know what we are going to do this week. Never mind, we'll hold out for all that. When one has right on one's side, it puts some heart into one, isn't it so? One always ends by getting the best of it."

By this time Mother Maheu was entirely but very sensibly in favor of the strike. It would have been better, perhaps, to compel the company to act fairly without knocking off. But seeing that they had done so, they ought not to go back until they got what they wanted. On that score she showed

herself uncompromisingly energetic. Better to starve to death than to appear to be in the wrong when one was in the right.

"Ah!" exclaimed Stephen, "if we could only get a cholera to rid us of these bloodsuckers of the company."

"No, no," she answered, "we must not wish for the death of any body. It wouldn't advance us any thing if they were to die; there'd be others to take their places. All I ask is, that they should come to more reasonable ideas, and I expect they will, because there are honest people every where. Besides, you know that I am not all in favor of your policy."

In fact she generally blamed his violent expressions; she thought him quarrelsome. That he stood out to have the work paid at its value was right enough, but why meddle with a lot of other things, with the middle classes, and with the Government? Why meddle with other people's concerns, in which he would only get the worst? Mother Maheu continued to respect Stephen solely because he did not get drunk, and because he paid her forty-five francs for his month's board regularly. When a man paid his debts and remained sober, one might well overlook his other faults.

Stephen began to hold forth about the Republic which would provide bread for every body. But Mother Maheu shook her head, for she remembered '48, a dog's year—as she called it—which had left them bare like her hand, her and her man, to whom she had only been married a little while then. She was so absorbed by her recollections, droned out in a mournful voice, that she allowed Estella to go to sleep in her lap. And Stephen, absorbed also, sat staring vacantly at her.

"Not a brass farthing," she crooned, "not a sup nor bite, and all the pits stopped. In short, poor folk clemming to death, like to-day."

But at that moment the door was thrown open, and both remained speechless with surprise at the sight of Catherine, who entered the room. Since her flight with Chaval she had not set her foot in the village. She looked so confused that she did not close the door behind her, but remained trembling on the threshold. She had, no doubt, expected to find her mother alone, and the sight of the young man put the little speech she had prepared clean out of her head.

"What do you want here?" shouted Mother Maheu, without getting off her chair. "I'll have no more of you, so be off."

Catherine tried to say a few words.

"It's some coffee and sugar, mother. Yes, for the children I've done some overtime, and I thought of them."

She drew from her pocket a pound of coffee and a pound of sugar, which she timidly put on the table. The strike at the Voreux pit worried her, while she was working at the Jean-Bart, and she had found no other way of helping her parents a little than by pretending to think of the children. But this proof of the girl's kind heart did not disarm her mother, who replied:

"Instead of bringing us extras you would have done better to stop with us here to get us some bread."

And having wound herself up, she overwhelmed the girl, giving vent to her passion by repeating every thing that was said against her in the village for the last month. To act as she had done at sixteen, when there was a family at home and in want! She must be the lowest of the low. One might forgive her for going wrong, but a mother would never forget such a trick. She might, if she had in any way interfered with her. But not at all; she had been left free as air; all that was asked of her was to get home of a night.

"What the devil can have possessed you at your age, say?"

Standing stockstill against the table, Catherine listened, her head drooping on her breast. The attenuated body of the girl, physically backward for her age, shook in every limb. She tried to answer, but her words only came in gasps.

"You make a great mistake if you think that's my wish. It's he who wants me to keep house for him. People can't know every thing beforehand. Well, what's done can't be undone; he'll do just as well as any one else, for he will marry me."

She defended herself without conviction, with the resignation of the female who knows that she must submit to the will of the male. Was it not the common lot of girls of her class? She felt no shame; she was only upset at being treated in that way by her mother before this young man, whose presence embarrassed and pained her.

Stephen had, however, got up, pretending to poke the fire, which was almost gone out, in order to lessen the awkwardness of the scene. But their eyes met; he thought she looked pale and worn-out, but pretty, for all that, with her limpid eyes in the face that was getting tanned. A strange feeling with regard to her uprose within him, all his anger against her was gone; he only wished that she might be happy with the man she had preferred to him. He felt still concerned for her; he would have liked to go to Montsou to compel the other one to treat her with some consideration. But she saw only pity in this tender feeling, which, as it were, still offered itself to

her; she made sure that he must despise her to look at her like this. At this thought her heart felt ready to burst; she almost choked without being able to find further words of excuse.

"That's the best thing you can do, to hold your tongue," Mother Maheu went on in a relentless voice. "If you have come back to stay, come in; otherwise, be off at once, and consider yourself lucky that I can't get up, or else I should have already kicked you out."

And the threat was being realized there and then, though not by Mother Maheu. Catherine all at once received a kick from behind, the violence of which stunned her both with surprise and pain. It was from Chaval, who had bounded in by the open door, and who fell upon her like a wild beast. For the last minute or so he had been watching from outside.

"Ah, you jade!" he yelled. "I followed you; I knew very well that you would be coming back here, and for why; and you treat him to coffee in the bargain with my money!"

Mother Maheu and Stephen, both dumb-stricken, did not stir. With a furious gesture Chaval drove Catherine toward the door.

"Will you come out of this, curse you?"

And seeing that she crouched in the corner, he turned round upon her mother.

"That's a nice game of yours." And with a withering glance he hurled a coarse insult at her.

At last he got hold of Catherine's wrist, and shook her, dragging her after him. When he got to the door he turned once more to Mother Maheu, still nailed fast on her chair. Estella was still lying asleep in her lap, her little face flattened against her mother's breast.

The insult this time more directly concerned the woman herself and Stephen, and with one bound the latter was by Chaval's side. The fear of disturbing the village by a fight in its streets had prevented him from rescuing Catherine, but he felt no longer master of himself; his fury got the better of him. And the two men stood face to face glaring at each other, thirsting for each other's blood. All the old hatred, the unavowed jealousy revived, and was ready to burst loose. One or the other would have to bite the dust.

"Take care!" hissed Stephen, his teeth firmly set, "or I'll flay you!"

"Just try," answered Chaval.

They still kept glaring at each other for a few moments, so close that their warm breath fanned each other's faces, until

Catherine, with a supplicating look, took her lover's hand, trying to drag him away. She got him out of the village, which she left behind her without turning her head.

"The brute!" growled Stephen, slamming the door, and so overcome with anger that he felt obliged to sit down again.

Mother Maheu had not stirred. She made a kind of superb sweeping gesture, and then a deep and painful silence fell upon both. They were repeating to themselves the insults of Chaval.

"He is a swine," she said at last. "Only a dirty swine like that could say and think such disgusting things. As for myself, I don't care a straw; I treat them with contempt."

Then in a frank and candid voice, she added, without taking her eyes off the young man:

"I have my faults, but that's not one of them. I never had but one lover before Maheu. If he had played me false like the other, I do not know what might have become of me. I don't stick myself up for better than I am, for having been an honest wife to him, because one frequently does not get into mischief for want of opportunity. Only I say what's the truth, and I know some neighbors who couldn't say as much. Am I right or not?"

"True enough," answered Stephen, getting up.

And he went out, leaving Mother Maheu to relight the fire. Estella, still asleep, was made comfortable on two chairs. If the father caught and sold his fish she would make them some soup, let come what might.

Outside night was falling fast, a bitter cold night; and his head low upon his breast, Stephen tramped along, sad and sick at heart. He no longer felt angry against the man, nor pitiful to the poor ill-used girl. The brutal scene was getting effaced, drowned in the remembrance of the sufferings of all, of the abominable wretchedness that had to be endured. He beheld the village without bread, the little ones, the women who had no food this evening, these famished people battling for their rights. And the doubts that beset him every now and then uprose within him again. Amid this heartrending melancholy of the gathering gloom it tortured him with a violence never felt before. What a terrible responsibility he was incurring. Was he going to push them still further? Was he to incite them to persist in their resistance, now that they had no longer credit or money? And what would be the end if no help came, if hunger played their courage false? Suddenly he beheld a vision of the disaster—children dying, mothers sobbing, while the men, gaunt and worn to skeletons,

went back to the pit. He kept tramping on, stumbling against every thing; the idea of the company proving the stronger at last filled him with inexpressible agony.

When he raised his head, he perceived that he was close to the Voreux pit. The somber mass of buildings looked still more gloomy in the gathering night. Standing in the deserted inclosure, obstructed by motionless shadows, one felt as if within an abandoned fortress. The moment the pumping engine stopped, life seemed to have fled these very walls. At this time of night every thing was dead; not the glimpse of a lantern, not the sound of a voice, and the thud of the pump itself sounded like a distant gasp, coming no one knew whence, amid this torpor of the whole of the pit.

Stephen kept looking and the blood rushed to his heart. If the workmen suffered hunger, the company itself was also eating into its millions. Why should it prove the stronger, in this war of labor against capital? At any rate the victory would be dearly paid. They would count the slain afterward. He suddenly felt repossessed by a battlesome fury, by a wild craving to put an end to all this misery even at the cost of life. The village might as well die at one blow, as linger on in agony, in famine bred from injustice. His ill-digested reading came back to him, showing him peoples who fired their towns at the approach of the foe; vague stories of mothers scattering their children's brains on the stones to save them from slavery; of men slowly starving themselves to death rather than eat the tyrant's bread. All this excited him beyond measure; a saturnine and sanguinary satisfaction suddenly sprang from his black despair. It chased away all doubt, and made him feel ashamed of his momentary cowardice. And with the revival of his faith the promptings of pride reappeared also and lifted him on their wings. The joy of being the chief, of seeing himself obeyed even to the infliction of the greatest sacrifices, the ever-widening dream of his power; the final triumph came back to him with renewed force. He already pictured to himself a scene grand in its very simplicity, his refusal of the power offered to him; authority remitted to the people's care when he should be the master.

But he awoke from his dream, startled by the voice of Maheu, who told him of his luck. The miner had caught a magnificent trout, and sold it for three francs. They would have their soup. Stephen left his mate to return to the village by himself, saying that he would be back by and by, and went to Rasseneur's. He silently seated himself at Souvarine's table, and neither of them spoke until a customer who

stood drinking before the counter had gone. Then Stephen told Rasseneur briefly that he was going to write to Pluchart to come directly. His mind was made up; he wished to organize a private meeting, for the victory seemed certain to him, if the miners of Montsou were to enrol themselves in a lump into the Internationale.

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